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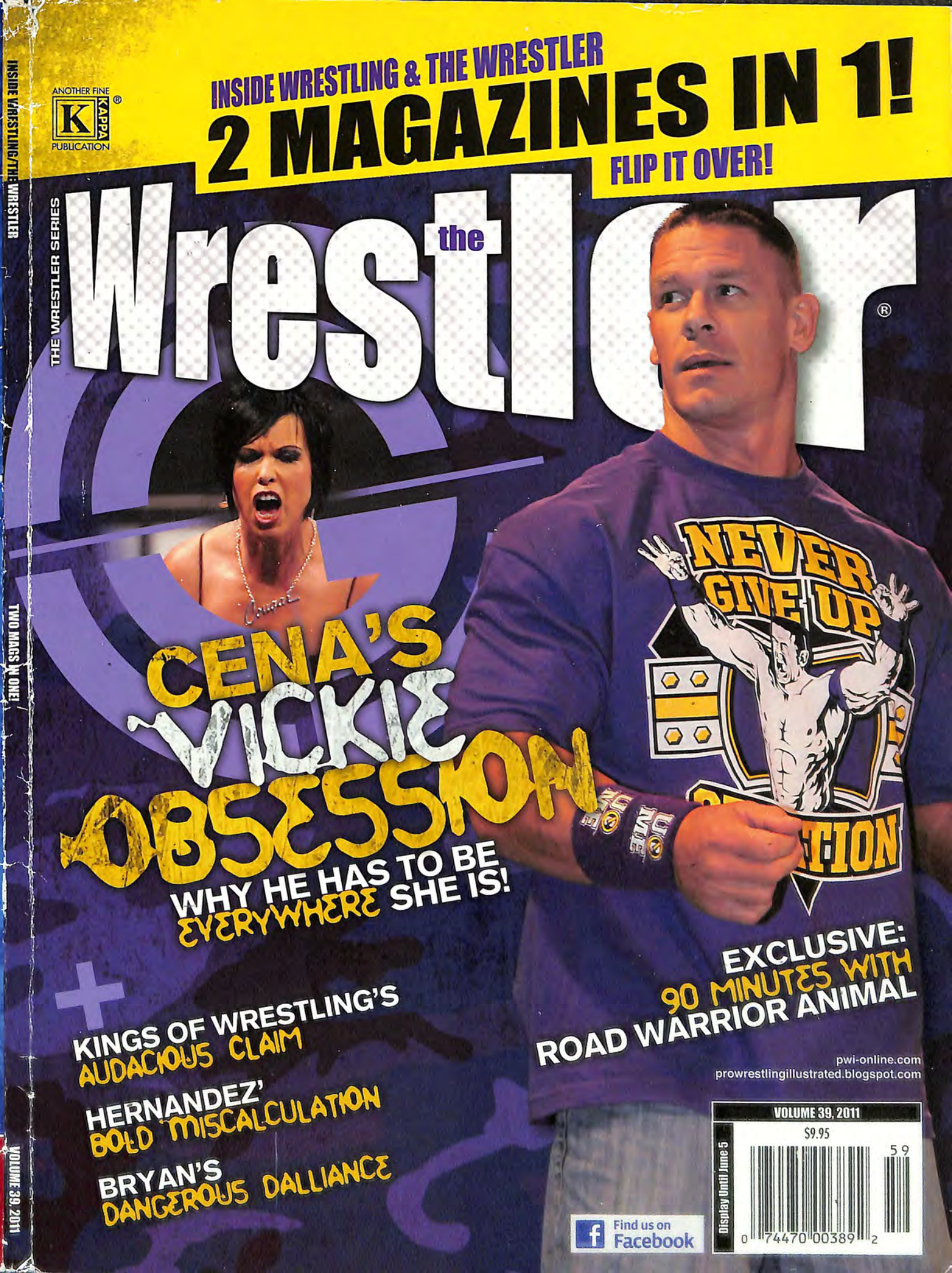

CENA'S VICKIE OBSESSION

WHY HE HAS TO BE EVERYWHERE SHE IS!

+

KINGS OF WRESTLING'S AUDACIOUS CLAIM

HERNANDEZ' BOLD MISCALCULATION

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VOLUME 39, 2011

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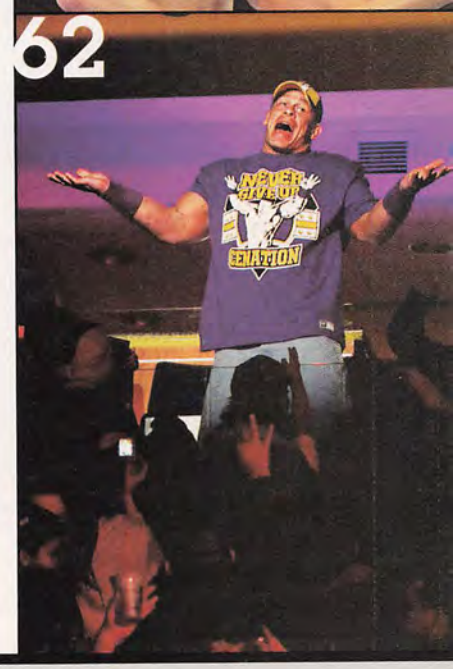

Look for the Volume 40, 2011, issue of *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* on sale June 7, 2011

YOUR LETTERS

THAT VOICE!

I don't want to get personal here, but as long as the Angles' real life is being played out on TV, I have to say this to Kurt: You're better off without her!

I know this is a combination of real life and TV melodrama, but I have a strong feeling that when Karen was angry with Kurt, he heard a lot of that shrill we hear from her on *Impact*. I can't even imagine what it would be like to have to endure that. I think I'd either have to leave town (which, thankfully for Kurt, he did often) or just "yes" her to death to put an end to it!

Karen Jarrett makes Vickie Guerrero sound like Lady Gaga!

SAL BOCCIELI
Brooklyn, NY

BARON HIS SOUL

I really enjoyed your Q&A interview with Baron Von Raschke in Volume 37, 2011. I grew up in that time period watching Baron, The Crusher, Verne Gagne, Mad Dog Vachon, and the rest. Your interview brought back a lot of wonderful memories of the glory days of professional wrestling. I hope you will continue interviewing wrestlers from the territorial days from all parts of the country.

TOM JOHNSON
Richfield, MN

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Karen Angle speaks and new hubby Jeff Jarrett hangs on every word. Reader Sal Boccieli speculates that Karen's angry voice (perhaps more so than her actual anger) played a part in her split with Kurt.

"500" A DISTANT MEMORY

Just a few months ago, AJ Styles was one of the hottest names in wrestling. Now, he's just another name on the long list of people in TNA who have been pushed to the back. Someone of his talent needs to be on the front lines, not playing second, even third, fiddle to everyone else in TNA.

Let me quote AJ from the article in the October 2010 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* in which he spoke of his selection as number-one in the "*PWI* 500": "I know I'm here for the long haul, so I'm going to force you guys to put me at number one again. That's all there is to it. There's no way you're going to keep me out of there."

Sadly, AJ, it looks like TNA took care of that.

DOUG FRICKER
West Lafayette, IN

SOME "MEAN" INTERVIEWS

While flipping through the channels the other night, I stumbled upon an episode of *Tosh.O* on Comedy Central. Normally, this would have nothing to do with my love of wrestling, except for the fact that he had a quick montage of wrestling greats, including Koko B. Ware, "The Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase, and Sgt. Slaughter, on one of his segments involving backstage interviews.

Despite seeing these greats of yesteryear all together again, it reminded me how much wrestling today is missing a great backstage announcer. Some of my most vivid memories are of "Mean" Gene Okerlund backstage with The Ultimate Warrior, Hulk Hogan, or Andre the Giant and getting some great conversations out of them.

True, these guys should be great on their own in the center of the ring, but not everyone is as seasoned on the mike as they should be. Maybe the top organizations should invest some time in a great backstage guy who can draw the best out of these younger talents, and help bring back this lost art form.

CEDRIC SHANNAHAN
Baltimore, MD

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Photo by Stu Saks

It may be just a matter of time before Dolph Ziggler wins the World title, notes reader Justin Wick. Edge will freely admit that the 30-year-old can go a long way on his talent and charisma.

ZIGGLER'S ON FIRE!

I would like to commend WWE for the recent push they have given Dolph Ziggler. As a fan of Ziggler, it is good to see WWE is finally showcasing his abilities. From his lengthy Intercontinental title reign, to becoming the number-one contender to Edge's World title, Ziggler has been on fire. He just keeps getting better and better.

With his refined technical skills and his natural charisma, Ziggler is a force to be reckoned with. If he is utilized properly, he has the potential to be a top star in WWE for a long time to come.

JUSTIN WICK
Clintonville, PA

BLOG HITS THE SPOT

There are plenty of paths to gather information out there on the Internet. But, as I whittle down the places I like to check for some great writing, I've found myself continually coming back to your blog. Though it's not updated as frequently as some of the sites out there, it is a great way to get the same top-notch writing I'm accustomed to from your magazines for free.

I look forward to the updates, and now that I've found you guys on Facebook, I'm updated almost immediately.

So, for anyone who hasn't found their way there yet, I totally recommend checking out www.prowrestlingillustrated.blogspot.com. While you're there, take the time to check out the archives to see what you've missed.

MICHELLE MARTIN
Avondale, PA

RUMBLE RAMBLIN'S

I know plenty of time has passed and everybody has WrestleMania fever, but I really wanted to comment on this year's Royal Rumble. After taking it all in, I will say this has to be one of my all-time favorites. There were great guest appearances by Kevin Nash and King Booker T, epic runs, such as CM Punk lasting more than 35 minutes, and new talent, like Michael McGillicutty and Wade Barrett, lasting longer than anyone could have predicted.

I really like Santino Marella, but I'm glad his cheap stunt didn't pan out, or what was a great Royal Rumble would have been severely tarnished.

DANIEL TEVES
Austin, TX

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY DAN MURPHY

WWE GENERATED A massive buzz with its mysterious 2/12/11 promotional video, and TNA decided to follow suit. But while the WWE video got fans speculating that **Sting** was on his way to WWE, TNA delivered the real deal with Sting returning to the company to win his third TNA World title.

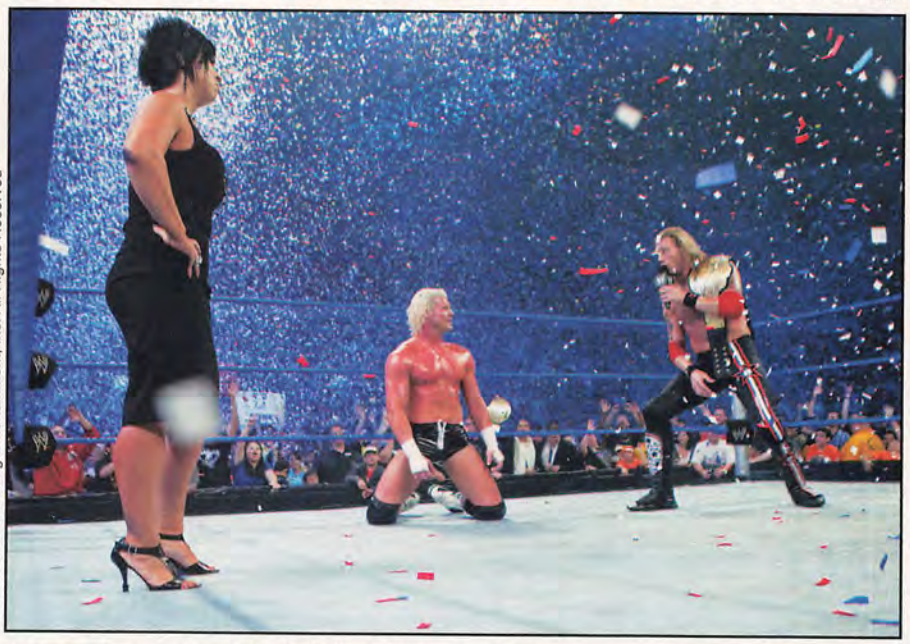
TNA promised the deliver "the most surprising shock of the year" on the February 24 edition of *Impact*. After a show that delivered a strong three-way dance between **Mr. Anderson**, **Kurt Angle**, and **Rob Van Dam** and an intense clash between **AJ Styles** and **Ric Flair**, **Taz** announced they had received startling video footage. The video footage showed a mysterious man in an overcoat walking in the rain and was very similar to the video WWE produced to build **The Undertaker's** return. Just like the WWE video, the TNA piece ended with a date: 3/3/11, which happened to be the date of the following week's *Impact*.

Sting returned to TNA on that date and defeated **Jeff Hardy** to win the World championship. While unexpected, Sting's return to TNA was by no means "the most surprising shock of the year," and many fans and columnists criticized TNA for blatantly copying WWE's promotional video.

While rumors of a WrestleMania clash between Sting and the "Dead Man" heated up the Internet, it appears that WWE had never contacted Sting at all. Meanwhile, Sting's return has changed the face of TNA once again and added another veteran to the already cluttered World title picture.

Sting's immediate title shot had to frustrate Mr. Anderson and Rob Van Dam, both of who have a legitimate claim to that opportunity. With Hardy, Angle, AJ Styles, and **Samoa Joe** also in the mix, Sting finds himself a marked man.

Another title change that sparked controversy is the bizarre WWE World title reign of **Dolph Ziggler**. On the February 18 edition of *Smackdown*, then-acting General Manager **Vickie Guerrero** announced she was firing **Edge** and declaring Ziggler to be the new World champion. However, during a coronation ceremony for Ziggler, Smackdown GM **Theodore Long** returned and revealed that it had been Ziggler who had attacked him several weeks earlier. Long rehired Edge and called for an immediate title match, which saw Edge quickly defeat Ziggler to regain the World title. Ziggler's entire title reign lasted a mere 11 minutes and 32 seconds. Following the match, Long fired Ziggler.



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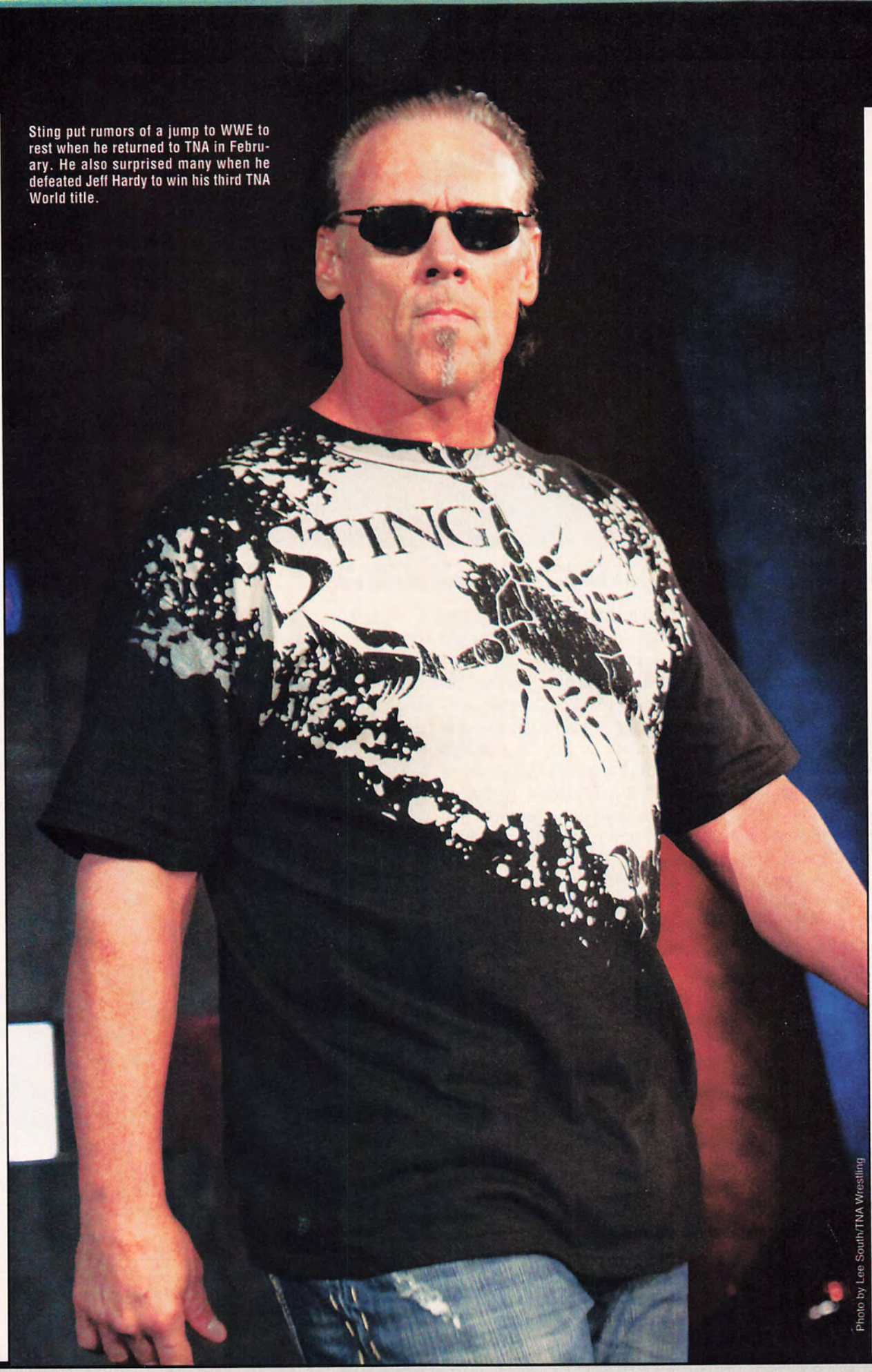
Dolph Ziggler was handed the WWE World title when Vickie Guerrero fired Edge on *Smackdown* in February, but his reign didn't last long. In fact, THE WRESTLER has chosen not to recognize it at all.

Even though WWE recognizes Ziggler's title reign, our family of magazines does not. Just as the WWF never recognized **Ted DiBiase Sr.** as champion after he bought the World title from **Andre the Giant** in 1988, we cannot consider Ziggler a champion for



Sting put rumors of a jump to WWE to rest when he returned to TNA in February. He also surprised many when he defeated Jeff Hardy to win his third TNA World title.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Mistico is an electrifying high-flyer who will appeal to all fans. He will compete as Sin Cara in WWE, where Executive Vice President Stephanie McMahon predicts his stardom will only grow.

having captured a title without actually wrestling Edge, the champion. As such, we also do not recognize the win as Edge's 11th world title victory.

WWE made a major announcement of its own on February 24. At a news conference in Mexico City, the company announced that it had signed Lucha Libre sensation **Mistico**, who will compete as **Sin Cara** (which means "faceless" in Spanish). The 5'7", 175-pounder is a high-flyer in the mold of **Rey Mysterio Jr.** and is known for his tilt-a-whirl headscissors takedowns and springboard moonsault. Mistico was ranked third overall in the 2007 "*PWI* 500."

"Sin Cara is a tremendous performer who brings the crowd to its feet every time he steps into the ring," said WWE Executive Vice President **Stephanie McMahon** of the 28-year-old from Mexico City. "With us, his stardom will only get bigger."

Jim Ross also commented on Mistico's signing. "A new star looms on the horizon," he tweeted.

In something of a swerve, WWE also announced that WrestleMania 28 will take place in Miami, Florida, at the outdoor Sun Life Stadium, the home of the Miami Dolphins and Florida Marlins. It had been widely anticipated that WrestleMania would be returning the Toronto, Ontario, the site of WrestleManias 6 and 18. Sun Life can seat more than 75,000 people for football, and could probably hold an additional 5,000 or more at ringside.

WWE Chairman **Vince McMahon** said he was pleased to bring WrestleMania to Miami, and said that the open-air venue is a big plus.

"You can do a lot more outdoors," McMahon said at a press conference. "We just need to keep our fingers crossed in terms of maybe a little precipitation, but I think we are good with that as well. We have some connections."

I wonder what kind of "connections" McMahon has; didn't he feud with God Himself a few years ago?

TNA Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** is certainly turning out to be a fighting champion. Rayne has announced an open challenge to any woman willing to face her, and has requested that her partner, **Tara**, not interfere on her behalf. **ODB** and **Roxxi** have already taken up the challenge and come up short. Incidentally, Rayne was married on February 8.

Apparently, **Hulk Hogan** is feeling emboldened from his legal victory over **Dixie Carter** for control of TNA. Now "The Hulkster" is suing a St. Louis-based car dealership, claiming a commercial promoting Southlands Imports and Suntrup Automotive Group falsely implies Hogan's

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA Knockouts champion Madison Rayne may not be the most technically proficient woman in the sport, but she has been a fighting champion. Rayne recently issued an open challenge to any Knockout—past or present.

endorsement. The commercial features a Hogan look-alike who uses the word "brother" and warns buyers not to get "bodyslammed" by high prices. That sounds like gimmick infringement to us, Brother!

Ring of Honor champion **Roderick Strong** successfully defended his title against former ROH champion **Homicide** at ROH's ninth anniversary show on February 26 in Chicago. In other featured matches on the card, TV champion **Christopher Daniels** and **Eddie Edwards** wrestled to a 30-minute time-limit draw in a best-of-three-falls match. There were some scary moments for Daniels after he hit his head on the guardrail late in the match. Daniels was said to be okay after the bout, however. **Davey Richards** defeated **Colt Cabana**, and **Shelton Benjamin** and **Charlie Haas** defeated **The Briscoe Brothers** to earn a tag team title shot.

Elsewhere on the independent circuit, **Jessicka Havok** won the Absolute Intense Wrestling women's title in controversial fashion. In January, Havok joined **Chest Flexor's** rulebreaking stable, Flexor Industries, seeking an advantage in her match against the 6'9" **Isis the Amazon**. Havok lost to Isis by DQ, but attacked AIW Women's champion **Angel Dust** later that night after Angel successfully defended the title against **Sara Del Rey** and challenged her to a title match on February 18. On February 18, Havok capitalized on interference from Flexor, who hit Angel Dust with a set of brass knuckles, and won the title.

Also on February 18, an interesting feud kicked off between **Melissa Coates** and **Melanie Cruise** in Purely Obsessed Wrestling World. During a tag team match pitting Coates and **Nikki** vs. Cruise and **Taylor Made**, it quickly became apparent that the former bodybuilder Coates and the 6' Cruise were bound and determined to establish which one was the most physically imposing female in the ring that night. Their exchanges, which included tests of strength, were generally considered stalemates. Unfortunately for Nikki, though, Coates was busy brawling with Cruise outside the ring when Taylor covered her for the pin. Even though Coates and Nikki took the loss, fans were happy just to see two wrestlers stand up to the recently turned Taylor and her bully partner Cruise.

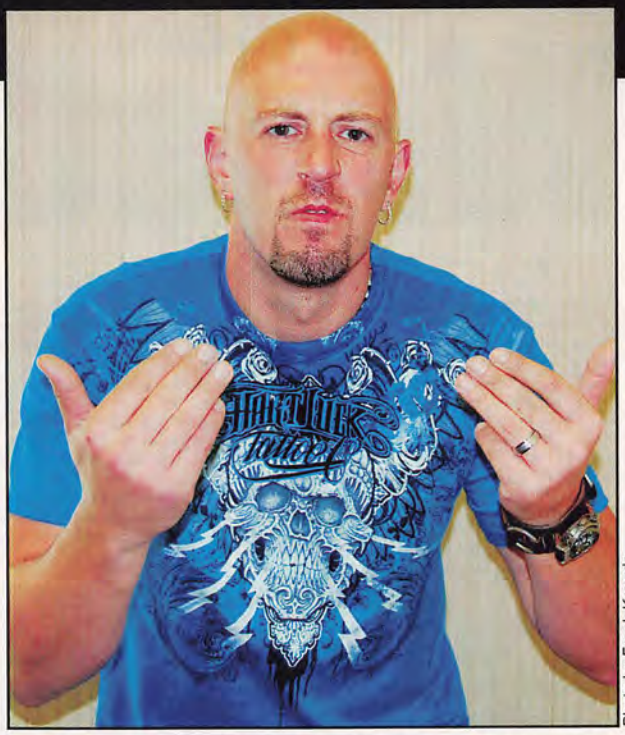


Photo by Frank Krewda

Justin Credible's quick departure following a Maryland card gave rise to rumors that he'd gone missing. Credible joked about the incident on his Twitter page saying he took off early because of the long ride back to his Connecticut home.

From The Don't Believe Everything You Read on the Internet Department: **Justin Credible** has not gone missing. The former ECW champion was the subject of some rumors that had him vanishing after leaving a show in Maryland. As fans burned up Twitter speculating as to his whereabouts and safety, Credible was apparently safe and sound at home, oblivious to the Internet frenzy. "The rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated, lol," Credible posted in an online statement. "I am and was 100% for all my events yesterday, dead and done with this topic. And the reason I left after my match was 'cause I have a six-hour ride to [Connecticut.]"

Finally, congratulations go out to **Scott Sexton**, who became the first New Era Pro Wrestling heavyweight champion on February 25. Sexton defeated **Mike Jablonski** to win that championship in Clarksville, Tennessee. □

Photo by Andrea Christine

Jessicka Havok recently won the AIW Women's title from Angle Dust after Chest Flexor delivered a well-placed brass knux punch to Dust.

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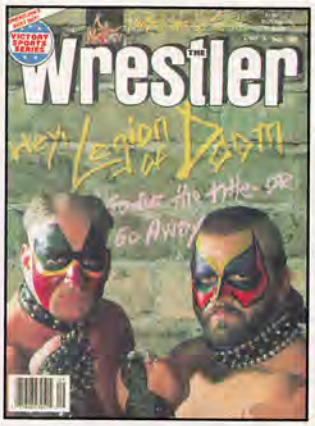

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ON THE FARM

BY LOUIE DEE

WHEN MASON RYAN came north to Connecticut, he was told to leave his Florida heavyweight title belt behind. If he was going to make it in WWE, his dominant FCW title reign wasn't going to help him one bit.

Well, Ryan is doing just fine, and as for that title belt ... Mason made a short trip to Tampa on February 3 and promptly dropped it to Bo Rotundo. Before that night was over, Lucky Cannon—employing the assistance of his new manager, Maxine, and Brett DiBiase—took the belt from Rotundo.

"It's better to be lucky than good," Cannon said afterward. "I just happen to be both."

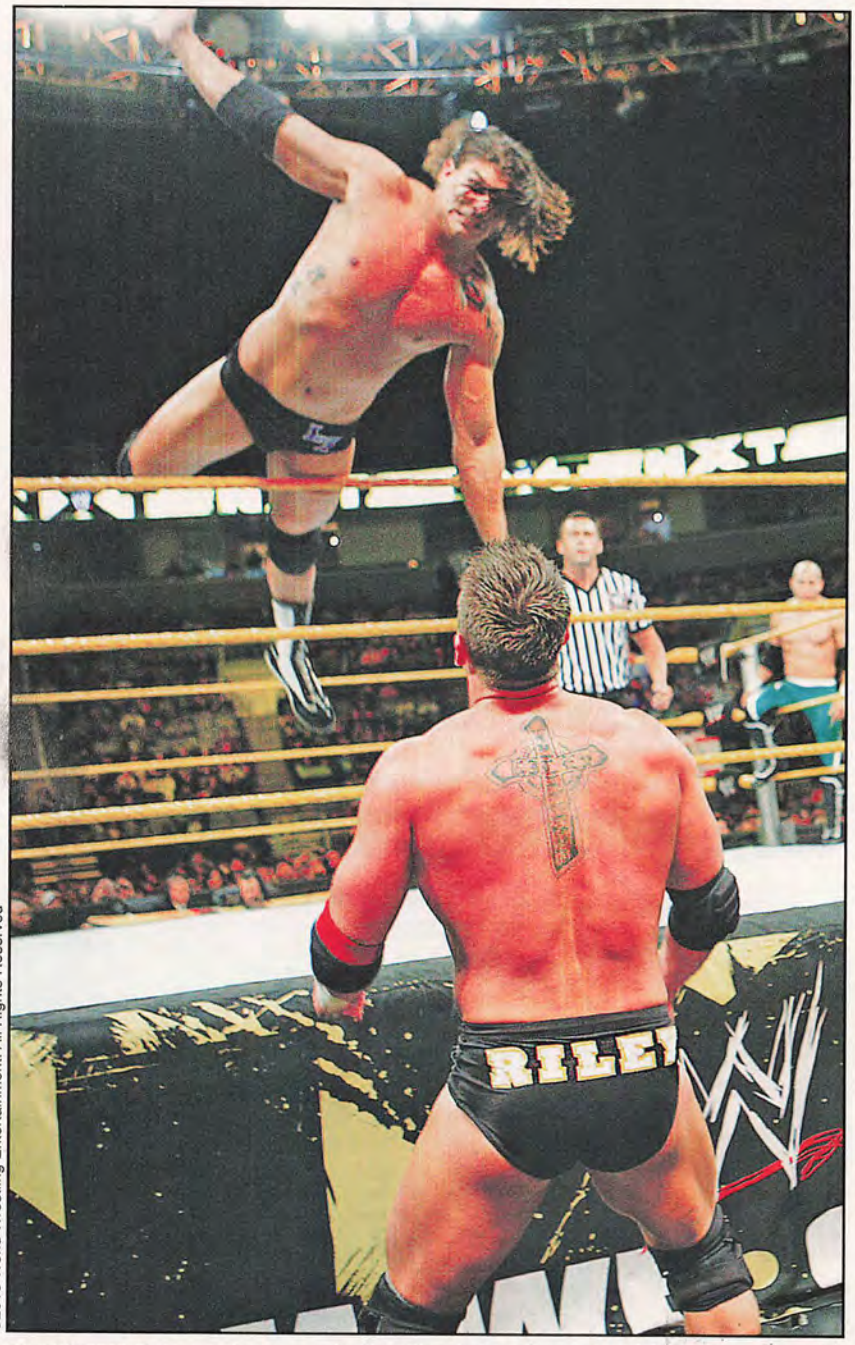
In the last "On The Farm," we profiled Seth Rollins as one to watch in FCW in 2011—and it took him less than two weeks to make that prediction look like a million bucks.

On January 13, Rollins, who previously competed in Ring of Honor as Tyler Black, won the inaugural FCW 15 Jack Brisco Classic, outlasting Hunico, Richie Steamboat, and Jinder Mahal along the way.

The FCW 15, which is basically a series of 15-minute iron man matches, first came to fruition late last year. Rollins and Hunico battled in the first one on the Thanksgiving weekend episode of *FCW TV*, going to a draw after each competitor captured one fall apiece.

This time around, it would be a four-man, round-robin tournament, with Steamboat and fellow "One To Watch" Mahal added to the mix. The round-robin portion was held in late-December and early-January on *FCW TV*, and after all was said and done, Rollins and Hunico won the most falls to set up a finals rematch.

"I've won a lot of titles in a lot of places, but this one ranks right up there," the former Ring of Honor champion told "On The Farm" after his victory. "FCW 15 matches test your whole repertoire, so outlasting three guys like Richie, Jinder, and Hunico, who know the mat game inside and out, makes this even sweeter ... and means I'm right where I need to be to



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Lucky Cannon dives over the rope onto Alex Riley during Season Two of *NXT*. Cannon was sent back to FCW, where he recently captured the heavyweight title from Bo Rotundo.

make 2011 the year of Rollins!"

Rollins was alluding to the fact that Steamboat and Mahal are second-generation wrestlers, while Hunico was a top star in Mexico before signing with WWE in 2009. For Rollins, the win proved to fans and FCW brass alike that he is ready to be a breakout star (and potentially a WWE call-up) in 2011.

AJ Is A-1. FCW Diva AJ made history of her own on the January 23 episode of *FCW TV*, winning the FCW Divas title from fellow *NXT* Season Three alum Naomi.

The win made AJ the first woman to hold both the FCW Divas title belt and the Queen of FCW crown. AJ actually holds the record for longest reign as Queen, having worn the tiara for more than nine months before losing it to Rosa Mendes last November.

Ready to Rumble. While AJ, Rollins, and others are making their stand in Tampa, a handful of former FCW wrestlers proved WWE's future is now on a cold night in Boston.

Foremost among them was Alberto Del Rio, whose victory in the 2011 Royal Rumble match earned him his World title match against Edge at WrestleMania 27. One year ago, Del Rio (as Alberto Banderas and/or Dos Caras Jr.) earned rave reviews with a great series of matches against Christian on WWE's April 2010 European Tour. Eight months later, after soundly winning feuds with "Captain Charisma" and Rey Mysterio Jr., there really wasn't any place for Del Rio to go but up to the main event.

Former FCW champion Mason Ryan also looked impressive in the Rumble, with his biggest moment being the sole elimination of The Great Khali—a feat that has, in the past, required the efforts of two or more.

Ryan's alliance with *NXT* Season Three alum Byron Saxton may have fallen apart, but the former U.K. Gladiator has made his presence felt on Raw since joining CM Punk's New Nexus, whose other members, all FCW/*NXT* alums themselves, helped the Second City Saint stay alive in the Rumble for more than 35 minutes.

In total, 18 of the 2011 Rumble's 40 competitors were FCW alumni, a stat that clearly means one thing: Developmental is working!

Photo by Wayne McCarty

AJ might not be more than a towel-tosser at this stage of her WWE career, but down on the farm, she's an impact player ... and a cute one, at that!

Is TE the E-N-D of NXT? With the return of *Tough Enough*, the future of *NXT* is once again in doubt.

Tough Enough's format is basically the same as *NXT's*, only at a more basic level. Add in a pre-*Raw* timeslot on USA and the presence of host "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, and you have a juggernaut that Matt Striker and wwe.com won't be able to match.

And even though it appears that *Tough Enough* will be cast from a pool of hopefuls not currently affiliated with WWE, the pickup by USA and the rumored launch delay for the WWE Network leaves *NXT* in doubt once again.

If *NXT* does get the A-X-E, it will end a phenomenon that helped 28 potential superstars get closer to the spotlight ... but further proof that when it comes to WWE talent competitions, it might be better not to win.

To wit: While *NXT* Season One winner Wade Barrett has had some pretty good success, Kaval has already been released by WWE and Kaitlyn is rarely seen on TV. Meanwhile, four Season One "castoffs" have already enjoyed title reigns, Alex Riley has been highly visible at the side of The Miz (who himself failed to win the last installment of *Tough Enough*), and six more of those eliminated are or have been part of The Nexus.

I guess 'tis truly better to have loved and lost. □

ON ASSIGNMENT

THIS IS THE worst time of year for a wrestling columnist.

As I sit here at my computer, shooing away my two overly curious cats, WrestleMania is still more than a month away. By the time you read this, WrestleMania 27 will be in the history books. That leaves us wrestling columnists in a tough spot. It's hard to be timely and relevant when the biggest show of the year happens four weeks past deadline.

I got midway through a column on Albert Del Rio when Frank Krewda informed me we already had a six-pager on the former Dos Caras Jr. elsewhere in this issue. I was starting to scrape the bottom of the topic barrel.

The return of Christian? The disappointment over Sting's non-appearance in WWE? Ric Flair running out of beer money and throwing a snit fit on TNA's European tour? *Yawn.* There has to be something else that's timely, interesting, and non-WrestleMania-related.

That's when inspiration hit and I turned my attention toward WWE's developmental system.

Word is that the WWE executives are looking to overhaul the company's developmental system, and I think it's long overdue. According to some reports, Triple-H is spearheading the movement, apparently feeling that the developmental system is failing to produce new, larger-than-life stars.

Eight years ago, WWE had the developmental concept all figured out. Jim Ross served as executive vice president of talent relations, and Jim Cornette oversaw the company's feeder system, Ohio Valley Wrestling. Ross had an eye for talent. Cornette had the wrestling knowledge and passion for the business to instill the right attitude into that talent. Together, they helped produce the likes of John Cena, Batista, Randy Orton, and Brock Lesnar. That's not too shabby.

But somewhere along the line, things fell off track. I'm not blaming the current head of talent relations, John Laurinaitis, or Steve Keirn, the head trainer of WWE's current developmental promotion of Florida Championship Wrestling. The real culprit here is the wrong-headed notion that wrestlers have to be television personalities. That's the same mentality behind using the cumbersome phrase "sports-entertainment" instead of "wrestling" or "superstars" instead of "wrestlers."

Why is Vince McMahon so afraid to call his product what it truly is: professional wrestling?

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Sure, the members of Nexus, all products of WWE's developmental system in FCW, can raise hell. But who among them, Liz Hunter asks, can tear it up on the mat? Hunter feels WWE and FCW should focus on producing better wrestlers.

BY LIZ HUNTER

The purpose of the developmental system should be to help promising independent wrestlers improve their game in order to perform at the elite level of WWE. It shouldn't be an open casting call for under-30 body-beautifuls, reality-show fame-whores, or would-be actors.

On one hand, WWE has done a great job of recognizing and honoring wrestling's past with its Hall of Fame. But how many Hall-of-Famers would even have a chance of getting hired by WWE today? How many WWE Hall-of-Famers would be able to win a silly *NXT* contest or make the cut on *Tough Enough?* Consider this: Two of the finest pound-for-pound wrestlers on the independent scene today—Austin Aries and Mercedes Martinez—couldn't even make the cast of *Tough Enough.* Does the fact that both are great wrestlers work against them? And if so, isn't that the most ridiculous thing you ever heard?

Jim Cornette wouldn't have stood for this. Jim Ross wouldn't have stood for this. Both of those men are traditionalists. Their wrestling knowledge is encyclopedic. They learned the wrestling business by coming up through the NWA territorial system; they are throwbacks to an earlier time, pro wrestling purists.

Once WCW folded, Vince McMahon somehow forgot he was a wrestling promoter. He tried to be a football magnate, a senator's husband, a movie tycoon, and a billionaire businessman. He somehow became ashamed of being a wrestling promoter, so he tried to distance himself from the wrestling game. And people like Laurinaitis and Keirn and so many others followed in lockstep, afraid to tell the emperor that he had no clothes. Men like Cornette and Ross got pushed aside.

Triple-H is a polarizing figure. He always has been. But one thing that no one can question is that Triple-H takes wrestling seriously. He trained under Killer Kowalski and had a brief run in WCW before catching his break in the WWF. He paid his dues, including an embarrassingly one-sided loss to The Ultimate Warrior at WrestleMania 12. But he steadily worked his way up the card and became one of the most successful main-eventers in WWE history. He has worked with the biggest stars in wrestling history.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Triple-H is reportedly spearheading an overhaul of WWE's developmental program. Hunter says Triple-H is the ideal candidate for such a project.

He knows that the current developmental system is churning out mediocre, cookie-cutter "sports-entertainers" like Andrew Jackson, Mason Ryan, Tyler Reks, and Ezekiel Jackson. More importantly, Triple-H is the one man who might be able to stand up to McMahon and convince him that an overhaul is needed.

It's time that WWE starts bringing in more *wrestlers.* Look how successful Daniel Bryan and CM Punk have been because of their wrestling chops. Neither of those men had an easy road into WWE. They had their critics who said they were too small or lacked personality. They succeeded *in spite of* WWE's developmental system, not because of it.

Hopefully, an overhaul can bring developmental back into balance. We don't necessarily need NCAA standouts and Olympians, but they shouldn't automatically be ruled out because they can't cut a great promo or run a stupid obstacle course. Wrestling takes all kinds, and the overseers of the developmental program need to remember that.

It's time for the WWE developmental system to take the radical approach that *wrestling* isn't a bad thing. It's what wrestling fans want to see. Imagine that. □

THUMBS UP

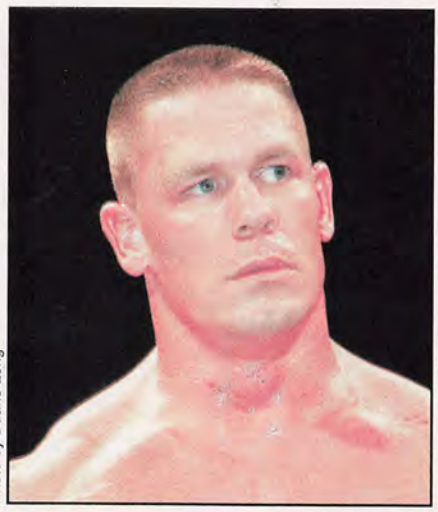

Photo by Duane Long

Thumbs Up to John Cena. Hey, it is easy to be intimidated when one of wrestling's all-time greatest talkers makes you the target of a scathing promo on *Raw*. But Cena proved he was at least willing to return fire when he cut a very entertaining and accurate rap/promo on The Rock a week after "The Great One" lit into Cena. Cena's rant was surprisingly risqué given WWE's TV-PG direction, but he deserves credit for bucking the trend and picking up the gauntlet The Rock threw-eth down.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to Mr. Anderson. For a month, Ken Anderson was the talk of the TNA world ... rather than being the mouth of it. Coming off a nasty concussion in late-2010, Anderson finally shook some of the demons of his injury-riddled past when he won the TNA World title from Jeff Hardy at Genesis. For the always outspoken Anderson, this one-month title run was a departure from his usual habit of talking up what he *could* accomplish in the ring, only to fail at doing it. This time, Anderson stayed healthy long enough to give his words some meaning.

Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Up to Alberto Del Rio. How many wrestlers fail to take advantage of the opportunities they receive? Too many. But Del Rio isn't one of them. In retrospect, it should not have been a surprise when Del Rio won the 2011 Royal Rumble to earn his WrestleMania 27 title shot. Del Rio—despite using underhanded tactics against Rey Mysterio Jr., Christian, and Edge—is actually a very gifted luchadore. Though his personality chafes at times, he possesses a ton of natural ability and he should be acknowledged for using it to get to the main-event level at the biggest show of the year.

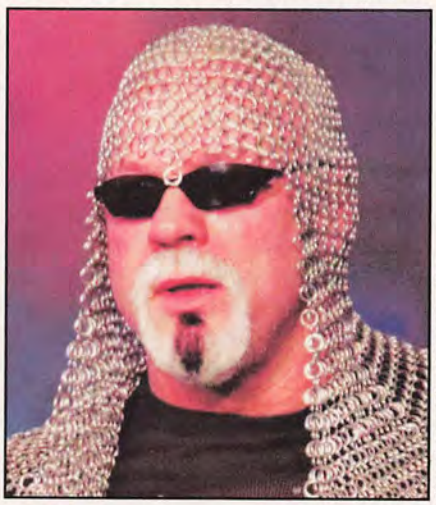

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to Scott Steiner. Even if we didn't necessarily want to see a full-fledged Main Even Mafia reunion in TNA, "Big Poppa Pump" should be praised for coming to Kurt Angle's aid when Jeff Jarrett and his cronies had him outnumbered. Steiner may be a loose cannon at times, but apparently he is loyal and certainly not afraid to get his hands dirty. Steiner's return should have just limited impact, but having an old friend to count on has made all the difference in the world to Angle.

THUMBS DOWN

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Thumbs Down to Vickie Guerrero. We've seen this act before where Guerrero abuses her authority to protect her boy toy in the ring by banning his opponent's finishing move. Heading into The Royal Rumble, Guerrero told Edge that if he used his spear against challenger Dolph Ziggler, Ziggler would be given Edge's World title. The real loser in this situation wasn't Ziggler or Edge. It was everyone who tunes in and buys tickets to see their favorite wrestlers perform their signature maneuvers in the ring. No wonder the fans despise her so.

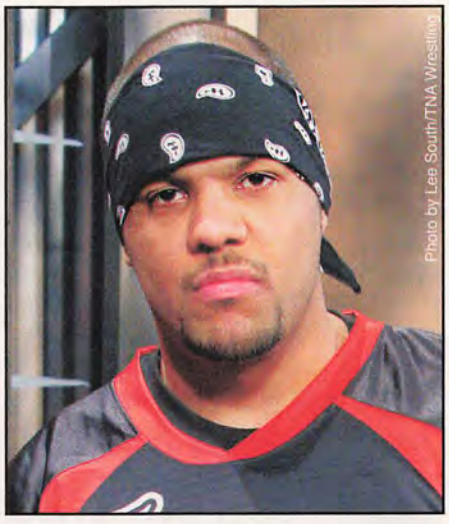


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Down to Homicide. Just because Homicide was once a staple of the ROH locker room does not give him free reign to attack whomever he wants. After competing in a recent four-way match with El Generico, Mark Briscoe, and Kenny King in Charlotte, North Carolina, Homicide flat-out assaulted winner El Generico while draped in a Puerto Rican flag. What made the attack so pointless was that Homicide did not even lose the match—King did! As an early ROH star, Homicide realizes the company was built around the integrity of its competitors. He should be ashamed for this disgraceful attack.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Down to Brother Devon. We can't blame Devon for the actions of his former partner Bully Ray, but we can come down on him for showing poor judgment. After Ray attacked Devon's sons on a recent episode of *Impact* as they watched the show from their ringside seats, Devon should have forbade his sons from even entering the Impact Zone at Against All Odds, much less bring them in the ring. Sure, giving in to a bully sets a poor example, but after seeing one of his sons stretchered to the back at the PPV, we bet even Devon wishes he had acted more responsibly.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Thumbs down to Sheamus. It's one thing to talk smack about another wrestler. It's quite another to talk smack and then get totally punked by that wrestler. That's exactly what happened to Sheamus after he ran down Mark Henry on *Raw*. Sheamus criticized Henry for never being a world champion and basically said Henry's career in WWE has been a flop. However, Sheamus had little to say a few moments later after Henry obliterated him in a ludicrously one-sided match. Please, Sheamus, don't run your mouth if you can't back it up.

POINT:

WWE SHOULD SKIP THE PPV BETWEEN ROYAL RUMBLE AND WRESTLEMANIA

BY DAVE LENKER

THE ANNUAL SCHEDULE of WWE pay-per-views is bloated as it is, so you will never find me arguing against the notion that they need to cut back. There are 13 events on the 2011 schedule, meaning that the company will once again be averaging better than a PPV per month.

This is where the money is, so there's little chance that Vince McMahon will do an about-face anytime soon. But if there's one PPV that WWE would do well to purge, it would be the show between The Royal Rumble and WrestleMania.

That this slot has been geared to feature Elimination Chamber matches over the past four years has only added to the problem. At best, hosting *any* event between the Rumble and the biggest show of the year is simply unnecessary.

From a creative standpoint, another show with a heavily gimmicked theme takes away from the importance of the Rumble match itself, and convolutes the "Road To WrestleMania." The Rumble has always acted as a natural bridge to the big event. The major storylines are all set up by the end of January. This, in turn, reduces the significance of the Elimination Chamber matches as well, as the results are often all-too-predictable.

With the "money" matches set, Raw's and Smackdown's respective Chamber bouts—as entertaining as they were—were an exercise in irrelevance.

Speaking of money, asking fans to shell out $49.95 each for two PPVs designed to set up WrestleMania is a bit much, especially when the second one is really just a "placeholder." How about throwing the fans a bone—perhaps even making Elimination Chamber a free television event (it's not like the nature of the matches would have to be altered in this TV-PG era). This would help spike interest for WrestleMania, while working toward determining the big event's card without undermining the importance of The Royal Rumble. Most importantly, it would save the fans some money, which they might in turn use to buy WrestleMania.

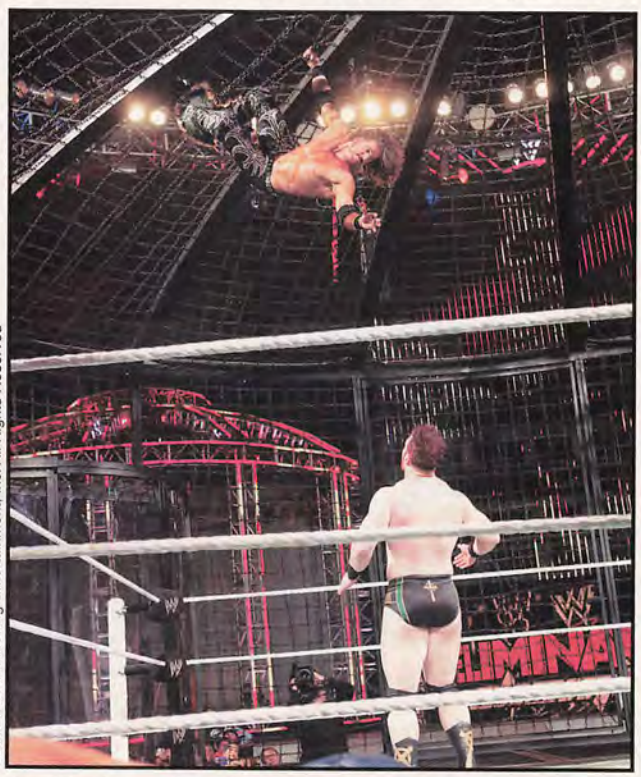
In these economic times, WWE should be helping to make things easier on its loyal fan base. And the benefits would likely go both ways, with more fans willing to shell out $55 ($65 for HD) for WrestleMania without having to part with a combined $100 for the shows preceding it.

Just as the fans need a break every now and then, so too do the actual performers. The very nature of the Elimination Chamber matches invites the very real risk of injury. At a time when WWE should be doing everything possible to protect its talent, heading into the most important event of the year, it puts its top stars in harm's way by placing them in the most barbaric of environments.

This does not make good business sense on any level. But, it really has less to do with the Chamber matches than it does with the idea of holding any type of event between the Rumble and WrestleMania. Clearing this slot on the PPV schedule would not only streamline the product and reaffirm the importance of the Rumble, it would likely increase WrestleMania buys.

In short, it would be a win-win for everyone.

Dave Lenker is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER



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The risk of a wrestler suffering an injury in the chamber heading into WrestleMania is just one reason why Dave Lenker feels the event should be scrapped.

COUNTERPOINT:

WWE SHOULD STICK TO ITS CURRENT PPV SCHEDULE

BY AL ALVEN

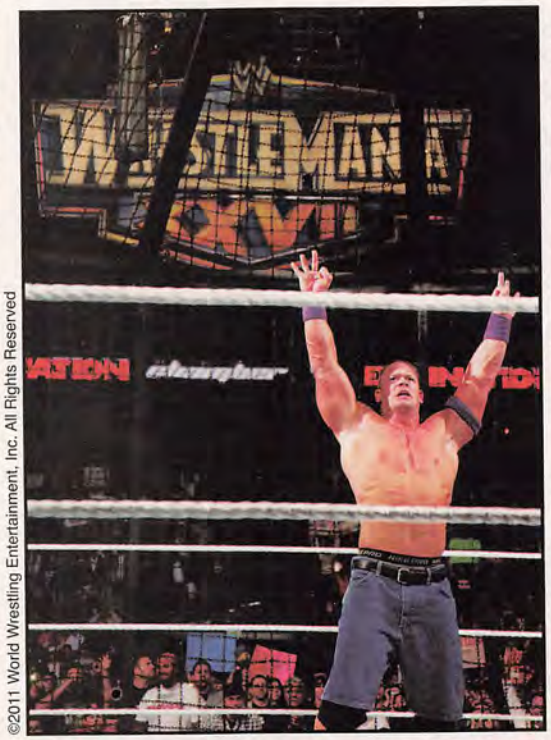
WHILE IT'S TRUE that the proverbial "Road To WrestleMania" begins at The Royal Rumble, there is still plenty of time between these two events; certainly enough room on the calendar for another PPV, especially one that actually helps bring the WrestleMania card into better focus.

Sure, this task could be accomplished on television, but the unique, high-stakes nature of the Elimination Chamber helps build to the big event in a more intriguing way. That many fans guessed correctly on the matches chosen to headline WrestleMania 27 does not make the Chamber card a typically "predictable" event.

It could just as easily have been Rey Mysterio Jr. emerging with the World title and going on to face Alberto Del Rio, or John Morrison coming out on top and challenging The Miz for the WWE championship at the "Granddaddy Of Them All."

The old days of four or five PPVs and long, drawn-out builds to main-event matches are a thing of the past. The distant past, in fact. Nowadays, the pace has quickened, and fans have an appetite for constant change. Therefore, holding the Elimination Chamber between the Rumble and WrestleMania is not just a good idea, it's practically essential to the WrestleMania build.

Over the past four years, WWE has done a very good job of using the Chamber matches (as well as the PPV undercard) to help flesh out and add intrigue to developing storylines. Rather than diminish the effectiveness of the Rumble or any other event, this actually speaks to the combined importance of each show.



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John Cena earned his way to a WWE title shot at WrestleMania with his Elimination Chamber win. That's better than him just being handed the opportunity, notes Al Alven.

In the brand extension era, the Rumble does not satisfy the need to fill two world championship match slots. The Chamber matches in February not only solidify these positions, they do so in a way that underscores the prestige of headlining the big event.

By winning the Rumble, Del Rio was guaranteed an opportunity to fulfill his self-professed "destiny." But Edge still had to battle through the Elimination Chamber and five other men to be the man to face him at WrestleMania.

In the absence of a February PPV, we likely would have been looking at a straight Edge-Del Rio build to WrestleMania, devoid of the twists and turns that the came about as a result of the Smackdown Chamber match.

On the Raw side, The Miz' engrossing feud with Jerry Lawler over the WWE championship actually helped set up two separate WrestleMania programs. And John Cena's Chamber match win positions him much better for a title match than simply being named number-one contender would have.

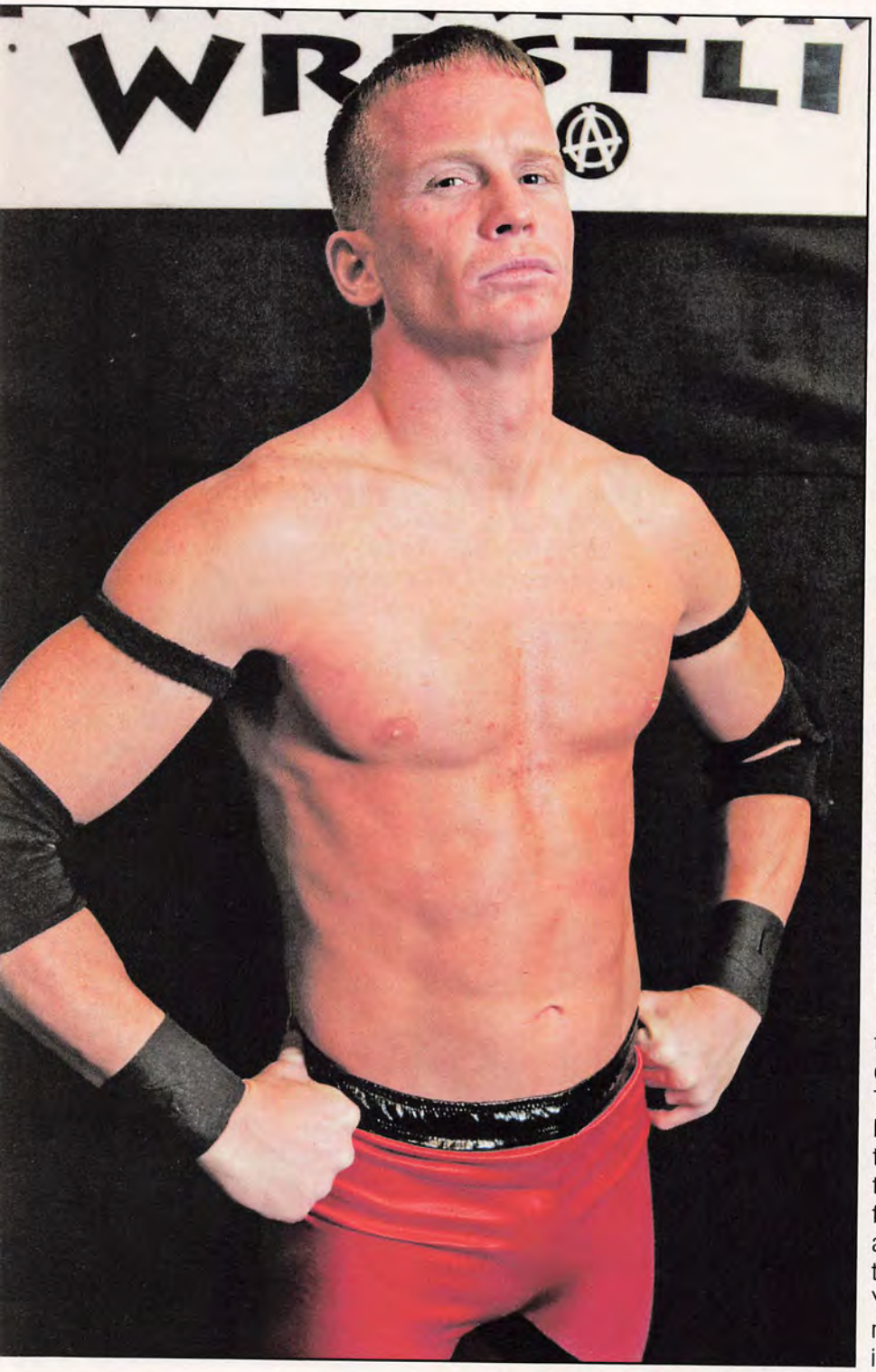
As for the Elimination Chamber matches posing the threat of injury to those involved, there is no doubt. Just as, say, the Money in the Bank match traditionally held at WrestleMania is not without its risks and generally leaves a heap of battered bodies in its wake.

But pain is the name of the game in this industry, and the reward for battling through it is the respect of fans. The brutality that Cena, John Morrison, CM Punk, and others put themselves through in the Chamber only amplifies how important it is to headline WrestleMania, and that is justification enough to continue with the present PPV schedule.

Al Alven is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER

INTRODUCING

MIKE POSEY



MIKE POSEY ISN'T satisfied being a recognizable face; he wants fans to know his name.

For years, Posey lurked in the background of matches for both WWE and TNA, donning the referee's stripes for bouts featuring today's top superstars. But with that stage of his career tucked into the past, the Alabama native wants to fight his way to the forefront of the wrestling scene.

"Ten years from now, I don't want to be the guy sitting in the locker room of some little show in the middle of nowhere saying, 'Ten years ago I was the guy who refereed an eight-second match at WrestleMania," the 33-year-old said. "I don't want that to be the only thing I ever did."

In spite of his small size (5'7", 146), Posey enrolled in wrestling school in 2000. Overcoming a concussion suffered on his second day of training, he returned with a newfound focus. Putting his aspirations to wrestle on the backburner, he trained as a referee. After working for smaller independent promotions throughout Alabama, his first break came in July 2002, when he received a tryout with Georgia's NWA Wildside.

The connections he developed there helped him land a position refereeing dark matches for an upstart TNA, an opportunity that eventually led to a spot on weekly pay-per-view tapings. And at one point during his tenure with the company, Posey found himself in a precarious situation with wrestler David Young. In the midst of a lengthy losing streak, Young stormed the ring during a match between two midgets, claiming he wanted a match. Before long,

BY ADAM TESTA

PHOTOS BY BILL BEHRENS

Mike Posey snares Corey Hollis in a figure-four leglock here, but more often than not, they are on the same side. Posey and Hollis are the reigning NWA Southern tag team champions.

Posey had seen enough. "I ended up dropkicking David right there," he recalls with a laugh.

That single incident ignited a flame of hatred in Young and pushed Posey from his role as a referee to one of an active competitor, albeit short-term. In the following weeks, the duo exchanged blows in a six-man tag team match pitting Posey, Shark Boy, and D-Ray 3000 against Young and his cronies Johnny Swinger and Glenn Gilbertti.

Posey, with an assist from Shark Boy, pinned Young, setting up a singles match, which Posey won when Gilbertti got Young disqualified.

Not too long after, Posey's tenure with TNA would come to an end. Shortly after receiving the bad news Posey learned that WWE was launching a new developmental territory, Deep South Wrestling, and hosting a show in his hometown of Birmingham. Posey began petitioning for the opportunity to referee a dark match for the promotion.

"I didn't have any guarantees or anything that I'd have a job or even a match," he said. "I refereed the dark match in Birmingham, and the whole time I was talking to Tommy Dreamer, who was in charge of developmental at the time. They started putting on shows, but they didn't have any referees, so I just showed up for all the training, two times a day, just refereeing, doing the drills, doing whatever they needed—just trying to get a start."

Posey's perseverance paid off, as he was soon offered an official WWE contract. He continued working at Deep South until word surfaced WWE would be resurrecting ECW as its third brand. By the One Night Stand 2006 pay-per-view, Posey became a full-time member of the brand's referee team and ring crew.

For about 2½ years, he officiated about half of all ECW's television, pay-per-view, and house show matches, including Kane's eight-second victory over ECW champion Chavo Guerrero Jr. at WrestleMania 24. His duties also included helping set up and tear down the ring at each show, creating long days and short nights on the road.

But by the end of 2008, changes were coming to WWE's referee structure and budget cuts were leading to personnel reductions. When the phone call came in January 2009, it wasn't a total surprise that Posey had been let go from the company. But that advanced worry allowed him to prepare for the future.

"I got the call on Thursday night that I was being released, and the next night, Friday night, I was wrestling in a little show in Alabama," he said. "I was ready to go. A lot of it for me was to keep my mind right and to be in a good place. After all the stress, I was ready to go out and have fun wrestling, which is what I did."

And that's what he has continued to do. Through the past two years, Posey has traveled the South as a solo performer, a tag team wrestler, and a member of Jimmy Rave Approved, a faction headed by the former TNA and Ring of Honor star.

Using his initial wrestling training, as well as tips and tricks he picked up from wrestlers in WWE and TNA, he's captured a number of regional titles. As a singles wrestler, he won the NWA Tennessee junior heavyweight championship and defeated veteran "Action" Mike Jackson to end his decade-long reign as the NWA Alabama junior heavyweight champion.

With Official Express partner Wes Adams, a former WWE Smackdown referee, Posey laid claim to the NWA Alabama tag team title before staking out with new partner Corey Hollis, the third runner-up for *Pro Wrestling Illustrated's* 2010 Rookie of the Year voting. Competing as Alabama Attitude and part of Jimmy Rave Approved, Posey and Hollis captured the NWA Southern tag team belts and appeared on *ROH On HDNet* and at house shows.

Now he hopes to expand his horizons, bringing Alabama Attitude and Jimmy Rave Approved to a more widespread audience. After all, competing is the only medicine able to cure Posey's self-diagnosed medical dilemma, Obsessive Wrestling Disorder. The cure, he found out, was getting in there and wrestling—not officiating.

"I have it," he said. "It's a real stigma. Once you get into this stuff, you're just in it. This is all I do; it's all I know." □

WORKIN' STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

ONE OF TELEVISION'S most venerable characters, Dr. Cliff Huxtable, gave a speech during an episode of *The Cosby Show* that has stuck with me for more than 20 years.

On the same night that Cliff and Clair's teenage daughter Vanessa introduces them to her new boyfriend, Dabnis, Vanessa drops the bombshell that they are engaged. Cliff is none too pleased, and explains that his displeasure has nothing to do with the man she is marrying, but rather with the way his daughter went about breaking the news to her parents.

Cliff asks Dabnis to tell him his favorite dish, to which Dabnis answers steak. Cliff goes on to describe the most delicious porterhouse dinner Dabnis can imagine.

"I'm going to present it to you ... But I don't get a plate. I take a garbage can lid and turn it upside down after taking it from the garbage can. And I take your steak and potatoes and your sautéed mushrooms and I give it to you. Not too appetizing is it? "It's in the presentation. That's the way she brought you here—on a garbage can lid."

Watching the wrestling universe celebrate the returns of Kevin "Diesel" Nash and Booker T to WWE, when some of the very same fans (myself included) were dreading their participation in a reincarnated Main Event Mafia, that speech came to mind. How is it that WWE gets praise for featuring these old-timers, yet TNA gets flack for doing so?

And it occurred to me that TNA President Dixie Carter would be well served to have a sit down with Dr. Huxtable.

Indeed, for too long TNA has been taking some of the most talented and important wrestling figures of our time and presenting them to fans on a garbage can lid. From Hulk Hogan to Ric Flair to Jeff Hardy, TNA has taken some of the biggest draws in wrestling history and neutralized them to the point that their presence makes no difference in TV ratings, live attendance, or pay-per-view buy rates. TNA officials like to blame factors outside of their control, like the economy, but fans know better. There's a right way and a wrong way to feature a wrestling act, and time and again TNA misses the mark by a mile.

TNA's plans on how to bring back Nash and Booker T were proof of that. After spending months building Immortal as the most dominant wrestling faction since the New World Order, the ostensible payoff of the angle was to have a reunited Main Event Mafia give Immortal a run for its money. You know, the same Main Event Mafia that did nothing to help elevate

Photo by George Napolitano

Booker T, being eliminated by Ryan Mason, didn't make much noise at the Royal Rumble, but Al Castle says that's okay, because Booker doesn't and shouldn't figure heavily into any WWE storylines.

young, original talent, nor improve TNA's bottom line, when it was the company's featured act in 2009.

As a backup plan, TNA gave the spot to a newly turned Fortune—an infinitely better move, and one that TNA made only when it was backed into a corner by Nash and Booker's WWE return.

The examples are endless: Credible tough guy Samoa Joe portrayed as a face-painted, knife-wielding savage. Exciting, likeable AJ Styles portrayed as a rulebreaking Ric Flair wannabe. Jeff Hardy—one of the most popular and marketable wrestlers of the past decade—arbitrarily turned into a heel with a Messiah complex. And on and on ...

This photo of Mick Foley smashing Ric Flair with a barbed-wire bat illustrates what Castle perceives to be the difference between WWE and TNA: WWE knows how to present its aging stars properly; TNA does not.

TNA has long boasted one of the most impressive wrestling rosters in history, but has consistently failed in presenting its wrestlers in the right context. That's been especially the case with its 40-and-over crew, which unquestionably still have value in the sport, but are pushed way beyond their shelf life.

Triple-H may have said it best when asked in an interview with IGN about the returns of Booker T and Nash to WWE.

"It's pretty exciting for the fans. I don't think it's something that they want to see them do every day," Triple-H said. "If you're a baseball fan and you get the opportunity to watch Babe Ruth take a turn at bat, you'd be thrilled. But you wouldn't want to see him play the whole game."

Not only is TNA having Babe play the whole game, but the rest of its starting lineup includes Ty Cobb, Cy Young, and Honus Wagner.

Meanwhile, in WWE, Nash and Booker were clearly portrayed as what they are: nostalgia acts, whose value is at its maximum when their in-ring appearances are kept to a minimum. WWE's vision of who its top stars are is clear: young, energetic, relevant acts mixed with a few older legends that still have some gas in the tank.

TNA is quite the opposite. With few exceptions, its top acts consist of WWE castoffs and aging wrestlers who gained their notoriety at least a decade ago (Hogan, Flair, Eric Bischoff, Mick Foley, Kurt Angle, Team 3-D, Jeff Jarrett.) TNA originals, including Styles, Joe, Beer Money, and The Motor City Machine Guns, are typically featured as mid-card acts. And so, they are defined in the eyes of TNA fans as such.

TNA defenders may argue that wrestling is built on star power—and so it makes sense to go with acts that have established track records. But the beauty of pro wrestling is that reality is malleable. Promoters can take a virtual unknown and, with a little bit of wrestling magic, convince fans that he is a main-event act. A year ago, wrestling fans had never even heard the name Alberto Del Rio. Today, he's a viable WrestleMania headliner.

It's all in the presentation. □

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

June 1994: After making his pro debut little more than a year earlier, Daniels claims the Windy City Wrestling light heavyweight championship.

BORN IN KALAMAZOO, Michigan, on March 24, 1971 ... Grew up a big fan of both wrestling and comic books, particularly Marvel Comics superheroes ... Enrolled in Methodist College in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he earned a degree in theater ... Trained at the Windy City Wrestling School in Chicago, under the tutelage of Mike Anthony, Sam DeCero, and Kevin Quinn ... Made pro debut in April 1993 ... Would toil for various independent promotions and also enjoy several tours of Mexico and Japan over the next several years ... Crafted the "Fallen Angel" character after turning his back on the fans and developing a God complex ... Also adapted and combined several wrestling styles, including mat-based, submission, and lucha libre ... Forged a reputation as one of the most talented prospects not under contract with WWF, WCW, or ECW ... Competed in All-Pro Wrestling in California ... In 1998, attended Dory Funk Jr.'s Funkin' Dojo alongside Kurt Angle, Test, Tiger Ali Singh, and Steve Corino ... Competed in several dark matches before televised WWF events ... Won the fourth annual ECWA Super 8 tournament, defeating Vic Capri, Ace Darling, and Scoot Andrews in succession ... That year, he performed briefly in the WWF as one-half of Los Conquistadores with Aaron Aguilera (with Edge and Christian alternating turns underneath the hoods) ... Also earned a shot at Taka Michinoku's WWF light heavyweight title on an episode of *Shotgun Saturday Night,* using the Fallen Angel persona he had previously crafted in the indies ... Competed briefly for ECW and another hardcore promotion, Southern California-based XPW ... Wrestled Mike Modest in a tryout on *WCW Monday Nitro* ... Nearly broke his neck, and had to finish the match with limited use of his left arm after landing on his head while attempting a springboard moonsault ... WCW was impressed nevertheless, offering both men 90-day contracts ... Briefly portrayed a hooded figure aligned with Vampiro ... Was not retained after the sale of WCW to Vince McMahon, and thus returned to the independents and Japan ... Became one of the "Founding Fathers" of Ring of Honor, playing the role of lead villain when the company started up in early-2002 ... Fallen Angel character evolved into a cult leader-type persona ... Altered appearance accordingly, sporting a shaved head and wearing a long, hooded robe with a priest collar and dark sunglasses to the ring ... Was featured in the main event of ROH's first show, a three-way match in

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

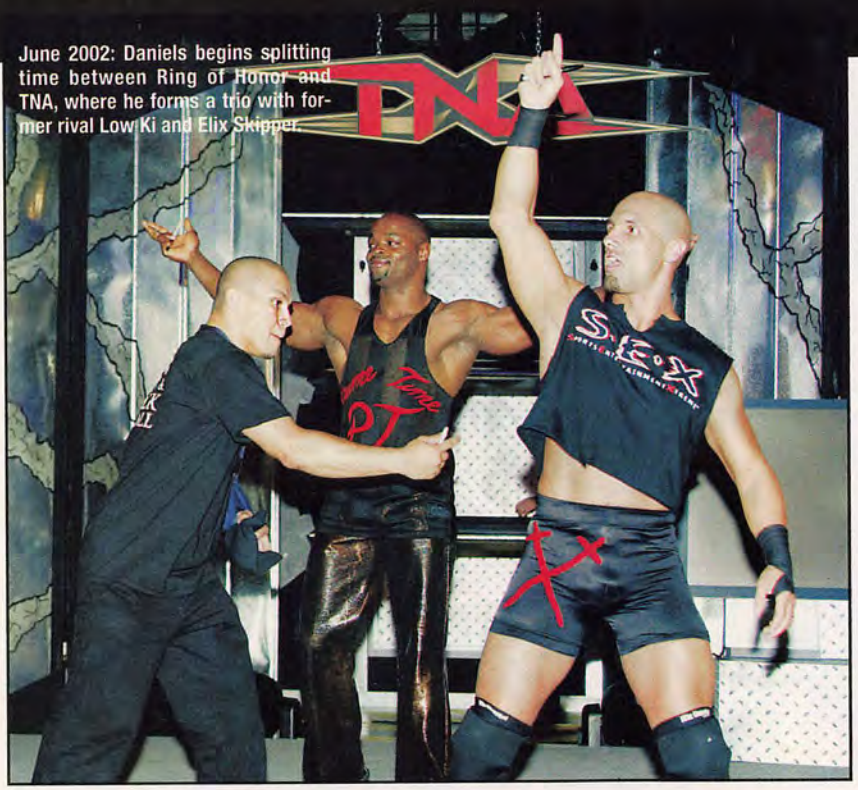
Photo by Diasuke Tsuchiya

March 1996: While touring Japan, Daniels introduces the comedic Curry Man persona to his fans.

which he faced off against Lo Ki and Bryan Danielson ... Lo Ki pinned Danielson to pick up the win ... Refused to shake hands with his opponents afterward, thereby breaking the "Code Of Honor" upon which the upstart promotion had been established ... Defeated Danielson at the next show, but lost to Lo Ki in his second match of the night, and once again refused to shake hands ... Formed a partnership with Donovan Morgan, which would prove to be the genesis of The Prophecy ... Defeated AJ Styles to earn the right to compete for the first ROH championship ... In that match, a 60-minute, four-way iron man affair that also included Lo Ki, Doug Williams, and Spanky, Daniels was the only man not to lose a fall ... However, it was Lo Ki who scored the most decisions, and was crowned champ ... Two months later, interfered in a Lo Ki defense against Xavier, allowing Xavier to score an upset win for the ROH title ... Immediately afterward, introduced Xavier as the third member of The Prophecy ... Later that night, teamed with Morgan to defeat Danielson and Modest in a tournament final to become one-half of the first ROH tag team champions ... As a result, The Prophecy held all of the titles in ROH ... Defeated Doug Williams in a stipulation match that banned Williams from shaking hands thereafter ... Hired a debuting Samoa Joe to take out Lo Ki in the first ever Fight Without Honor ... Lo Ki earned the win in the hard-hitting affair and the two men shook hands afterward, enraging The Prophecy ... With Morgan absent, teamed with Xavier and dropped the tag team title to AJ Styles and Amazing Red ... On the very next show, The Prophecy lost the ROH championship as well, as Xavier was soundly defeated for the strap by former ally Samoa Joe ... Stable feuded with The Group (Joe, C.W. Anderson, and Michael Shane), eventually forcing their rivals to disband after winning a stipulated six-man tag match ... Was left to ponder the future of The Prophecy anyway, after the departures of Xavier and Morgan ... Defeated a returning Xavier to earn the right to challenge Joe for the ROH title, but failed in that attempt ... Lured Dan Maff (formerly Mafia of Da Hit Squad) to join The Prophecy ... Turned attention to CM Punk, offering him a spot in the group ... Punk declined and soon after, someone attacked his girlfriend, Lucy Fur, backstage, driving her out of ROH ... Soon revealed the assailant to be B.J. Whitmer, whom Daniels named the newest member of The Prophecy ... A wild six-man match between The Prophecy and The Second City Saints (Punk, Colt Cabana, and Ace Steel) ended in a disqualification when Whitmer accidentally hit the referee with a chair ... Was attacked by Punk afterward, suffering a Pepsi Plunge through a table ... As a result, would not be seen in ROH for the next year-and-a-half ... During the early days of ROH, was also prominent figure as TNA was getting off the ground ... Formed a stable with Lo Ki and Elix Skipper called Triple-X ... Also joined Vince Russo's Sports Entertainment Xtreme (SEX) faction ... Was recognized as a champion after Lo Ki and Skipper defeated America's Most Wanted (Chris Harris & James Storm) for the NWA tag team title ... Lost the belts to Jerry Lynn and Amazing Red, but regained them less than a month later ... Dropped the title to AMW in a spectacular steel cage match

July 1999: While competing on the indy circuit, Daniels refines yet another character—The Fallen Angel.

February 2000: Wins his first of two ECWA Super 8 Tournaments with victories over Vic Capri, Ace Darling, and Scoot Andrews.



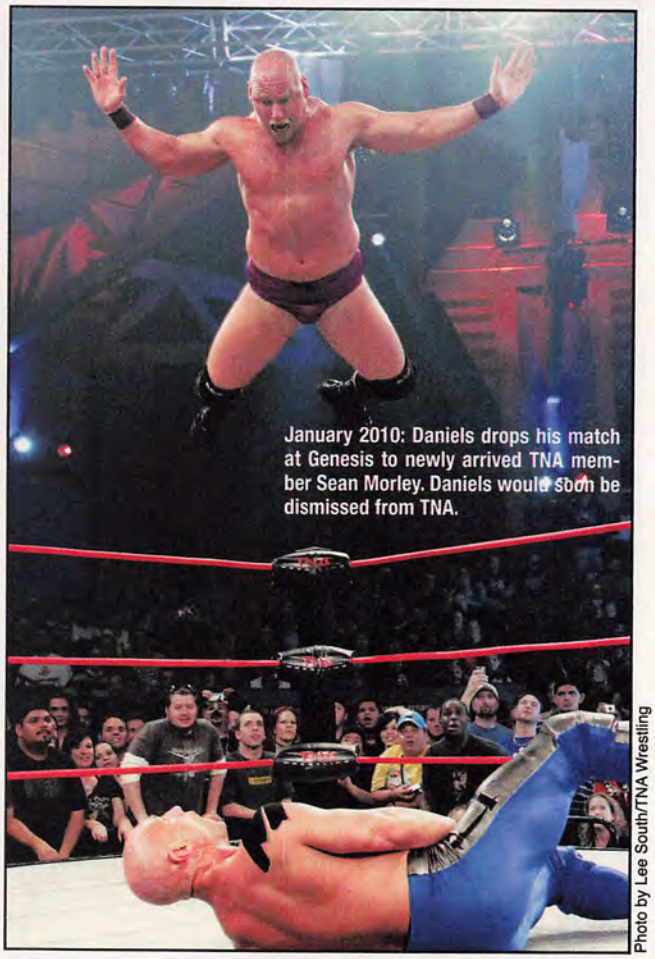
June 2002: Daniels begins splitting time between Ring of Honor and TNA, where he forms a trio with former rival Low Ki and Elix Skipper.

... Triple-X then disbanded, following Lo Ki's departure for Japan ... Feuded with Jeff Jarrett and also began a pursuit of the X division title ... Briefly reunited with Skipper, but Triple-X was forced to disband for good after losing to AMW ... Engaged in a lengthy feud with AJ Styles—and, eventually, Samoa Joe—over the X division title ... Won the title in an Ultimate X Challenge ... Styles had retrieved the belt, but the referee was unconscious; Daniels revived him after hitting Styles with his Angel's Wings finisher and grabbing the strap ... Became longest-reigning X division champion in history, holding title for over 150 days ... Scored successful defenses over Elix Skipper, Shocker, Petey Williams, Matt Bentley, Chris Sabin, and Austin Aries ... Lost title back to Styles in a three-way match that also included Samoa Joe ... Sustained a Grade III concussion after receiving a muscle buster on a steel chair from Joe ... Regained the X division title in another Ultimate X match, but soon lost it to Joe ... Returned to ROH and immediately targeted ROH champion Punk, who had previously driven him from the promotion ... Back in TNA, teamed with Styles to win the NWA tag team title from America's Most Wanted ... Traded the title with the Latin American Xchange (Homicide & Hernandez) ... Also formed partnership with Matt Sydal in ROH ... Duo beat Chris Hero and Claudio Castagnoli for the ROH tag team title ... Lost title to Mark and Jay Briscoe ... Defeated Chris Sabin to capture third X division title, but lost it back to him shortly after ... After absence, returned to TNA with renewed focus ... Sported a beard and tribal face paint ... Ended up on the short end of a brief feud with Sting ... Defeated Senshi (the former Lo Ki) in a Feast or Fired match ... Was fired from TNA after briefcase revealed a pink slip ... Returned under a mask as Curry Man, a wacky persona he had originated in Japan ... Formed a partnership with Shark Boy ... Represented TNA in the 2008 World X Cup ... Again collected a Feast or Fired briefcase, and again was fired, signaling the end of the Curry Man gimmick in TNA ... In early-2009, began portraying the Suicide character while Kaz, the original Suicide, was recovering from injury ... Was in the costume when Suicide won the X division title in an Ultimate X match at Destination X ... Returned to TNA TV as "Daniels" ... Pinned Kurt Angle, but decision was overturned by Jeff Jarrett ... After being accused by other wrestlers of being Suicide, saved the mysterious fan favorite from an attack and possible unmasking ... Feuded with Shane Douglas, defeating the former ECW champion at Slammiversary ... After unsuccessfully challenging for the X division title, turned at-

November 2002: As leader of The Prophecy, Daniels guides Xavier (far left) to the ROH heavyweight title.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

November 2006: Along with Matt Sydal captures the Ring of Honor tag team title from Claudio Castagnoli and Chris Hero.



January 2010: Daniels drops his match at Genesis to newly arrived TNA member Sean Morley. Daniels would soon be dismissed from TNA.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

tention to friend AJ Styles and his TNA World championship … Began claiming that TNA had coddled Styles, giving him too much opportunity to succeed … Turned on Styles, but was unable to take his title … Lost to Sean Morley at Genesis … Was released from TNA on March 31, 2010, after spending eight years with the company … Competed in CHIKARA Pro's King of Trios tournament as Curry Man (a replacement for the injured Cassandro) … Teamed with Los Ice Creams (El Hijo del Ice Cream & Ice Cream Jr.) … Trio lost in the first round to Team Perros del Mal (El Alebrije, Cuije, & El Oriental) … As Christopher Daniels, defeated Hallowicked the following day and lost to Eddie Kingston on the final day of the tournament … Made debut for Mexican promotion AAA … Was introduced as a surprise member of the villainous La Legion Extranjera (Foreign Legion) … Teamed with stablemates Alex Koslov and Joe Lider to defeat AAA cruiserweight champion Extreme Tiger, Jack Evans, and Rocky Romero … Pinned Tiger to score the win for his team … Returned to ROH and quickly entered the Pick 6 rankings … Suffered a ruptured eardrum in a win over Kenny Omega … Was beaten by ROH champion Roderick Strong … One month later, defeated Eddie Edwards to become the company's second TV champion … Lost to Homicide in a non-title number-one contender's match at Final Battle 2010 … Returned to TNA in early-2011, reprising his role as Suicide … In ROH, pinned champion Roderick Strong in an impromptu, non-title bout … Teamed with Strong and ROH tag team champions Chris Hero and Claudio Castagnoli in a losing effort in a "Champions vs. All-Stars" match, against Davey Richards, El Generico, and Mark and Jay Briscoe … Has since scored successful TV title defenses against Castagnoli and Mark Briscoe. □

February 2011: Daniels reprises the Suicide character in TNA. It is his second stint as the video-game-character-come-to -life.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST TAG TEAM!

THEY SNACKED ON DANGER AND DINED ON DEATH!

"**I think the Road Warriors, or LOD, was one of the greatest wrestling tag teams of all time**. . . . All I can do is shake my head and smile at the memory of a spiked-up Joe saying, 'Tell 'em, Hawk!' and Mike with that crazy mad look on his face, his tongue hanging out, barking out, '**Oh . . . what a rush!**' Both Joe and Mike were first-rate pros who were loved and respected by all who knew them."

—BRET "THE HITMAN" HART

Check out Animal in episode 10 of Medallion Mondays!!

One of the 1st 20 webisodes picked for the 2011 LA Webfest!

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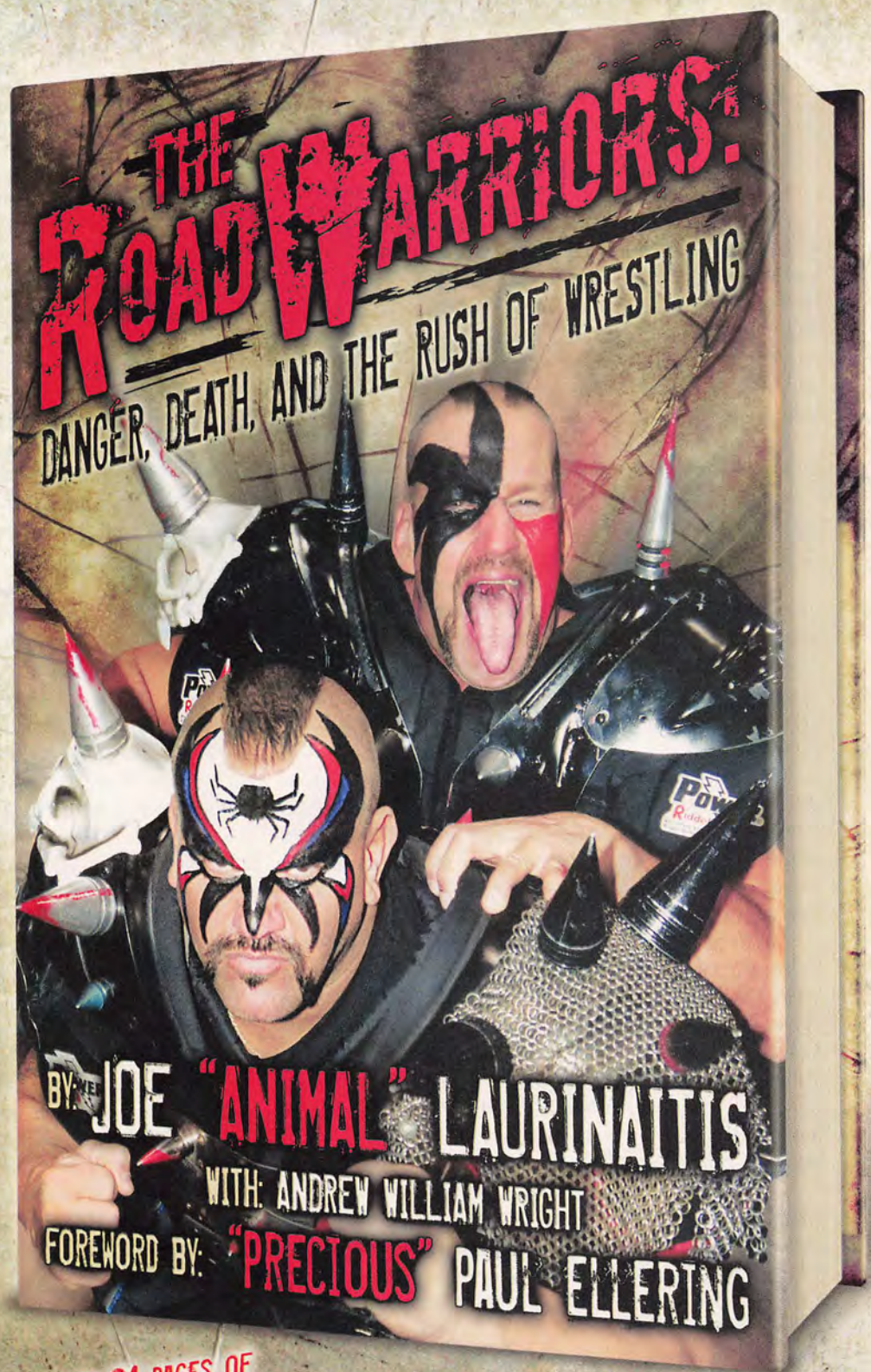

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Q & A

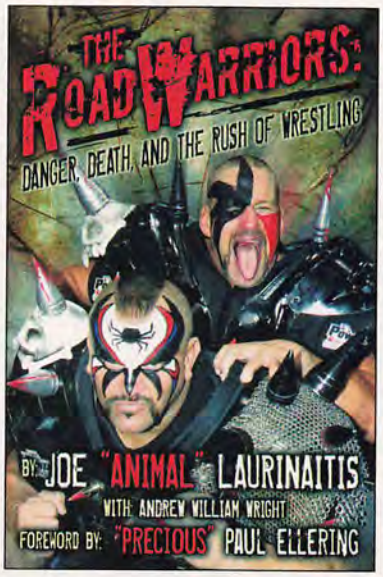
ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL

"We'll go down as the greatest tag team of all-time"

TWENTY-YEAR-OLD Joe Laurinaitis sat at a 45-degree angle doing incline presses, finished the 10th rep, and racked the 315-pound barbell. As he caught his breath, a big hand slapped him across the chest. "So you're Laurinaitis, huh?" rasped a burly voice. "You're sick in the head. Nobody should be able to do that many reps at your age."

Laurinaitis' eyes rested on Mike Hegstrand for the first time. The newfound friends would embark on a two-decade wrestling odyssey that remains unparalleled to this day.

In 1982, Laurinaitis debuted simply as The Road Warrior in Georgia, but Hegstrand soon joined him and their monikers were changed to "Animal" and "Hawk." The Road Warriors became the breakout stars of "Precious" Paul Ellering's Legion of Doom and Ted Turner's SuperStation WTBS.



Animal and Hawk reigned as National tag team champions on four occasions, and their cable-television exposure created a huge demand. The Road Warriors main-evented most of the major territories, including Memphis, the Mid-South, and the Pacific Northwest. They held the AWA World tag team title for over a year in 1984-85.

The Road Warriors reached their zenith in Jim Crockett Promotions, where they held the NWA World tag team title in 1988-89. And while the "Roadies" had permeated the popular culture in the U.S., they were mainstream celebrities in Japan, known as much for their commercial endorsements as their in-ring dominance. They finally conquered the WWF by defeating The Nasty Boys for the WWF World tag team title at SummerSlam '91—thereby becoming the only duo to win world tag belts in the WWF, NWA, and AWA.

Unfortunately, Hawk's personal demons and Animal's forced hiatus due to a severe back injury derailed The Road Warriors in the mid-1990s. They returned to the WWF in the late-'90s and early-2000s, but all comebacks came to an end with Mike Hegstrand's sudden death on October 19, 2003. Animal, however, did return to action in 2005 and joined Jon Heidenreich to beat M-N-M for the WWE tag team title and dedicated their reign to Hawk.

*In recent years, Laurinaitis' son, James, a middle linebacker with the St. Louis Rams, has managed to eclipse his father's notoriety. Laurinaitis still lives in Minnesota with wife Julia, a former bodybuilder. His eldest son, Joe Jr., served in Iraq as a member of the U.S. Army, and his daughter, Jessica, excelled in hockey during her high school career. His autobiography, **The Road Warriors: Danger, Death, And The Rush Of Wrestling**, was published by Medallion Press and recently hit bookstores.*

"Although Joe enjoyed greater fame and success as a tag team wrestler than anyone else in history, he comes across as, well, a regular Joe—somebody you'd like to have pull up a barstool next to you," stated Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who spent over an hour-and-a-half talking to Laurinaitis. "But after just five minutes, you'll appreciate the passion he has for The Road Warriors and their legacy. He's a Warrior to his core."

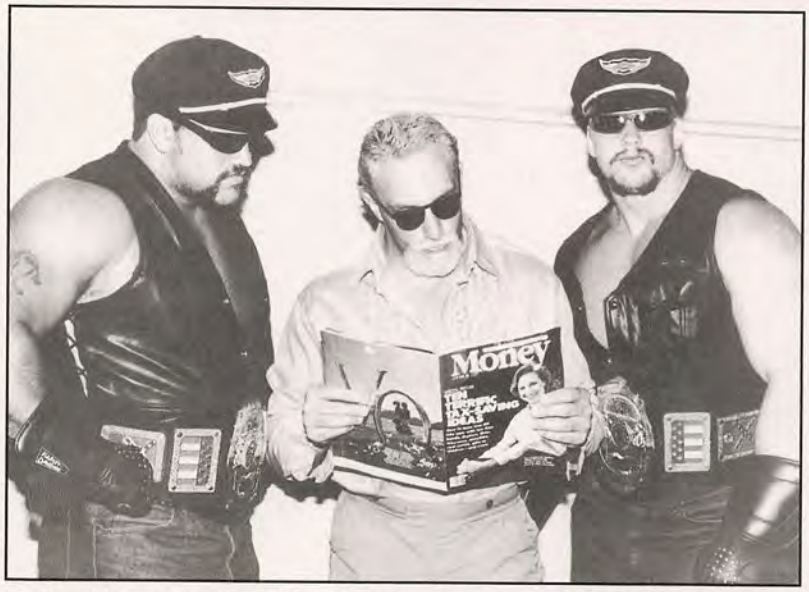
Q: When fans read your autobiography, *The Road Warriors: Danger, Death, And The Rush Of Wrestling*, what will they learn about you that they didn't know before?

A: My book is about two punk kids from the street who get a lucky break. We were bouncing at a bar, where we met Eddie Sharkey, who trained Jesse "The Body" Ventura, and he said he might be starting another wrestling camp. I was about 300 pounds and Hawk was about 260. I worked there with Barry Darsow, otherwise known as Demolition Smash, and he was about 340 pounds. Rick Rude was there and he was about 235.

Q: Hey, I wouldn't want to do anything wrong in that bar.

A: Yeah (laughs). We were all friends starting out, and all four of us made it. Later on, Scott Norton made it big with the NWO. Nikita Koloff, too, was out of the same training center. But Eddie never smartened us up during training, so we were punching each other and breaking each other's noses. I dislocated my tibia on my lower leg when Barry Darsow gave me a tackle. We didn't know any better.

Photo by Jessica Laurinaitis



The Road Warriors sported a different look when they first wore the National tag team title belts in 1983. Manager Paul Ellering didn't care what they looked like, as long as they created mayhem and invested wisely.

Q: I see you wrote the book with Andrew Wright. How did you join forces with him?

A: Andrew had a promotion company and I made personal appearances for him. We did that for five years before Andrew and I got together to write this book. He paid me very well, cash as soon as I got off the plane. He was a fan in the Virginia area from about the time he was about 10 years old, so he knew everything The Road Warriors had ever done in professional wrestling. He jogged my memory about things I didn't even remember. That's what I needed, someone with that kind of love and desire for it. He bugged me for about a year to let him write my book, and I finally broke down and agreed to do it.

Q: You're from Minnesota. Did you grow up watching the AWA?

A: I bounced in a bar called Thumper's. Jim Brunzell used to come in because he was a big fan of a band called Fragile. I also saw Greg Gagne, and I felt that if I got into a rumble with these guys that I would come out on top—so I figured there was more than met the eye. The first match that got me into wrestling was Hulk Hogan against Nick Bockwinkel for the AWA championship. I'll never forget the sight of Hulk Hogan walking about 100 yards to the ring at the St. Paul Civic Center, and the crowd went nuts. I thought about how cool it would be to achieve that kind of response someday.

Q: You said Eddie Sharkey approached you guys. Did he have to do much convincing?

A: We thought he was kidding at first. But we were confident we could do it. I was a diver when I was younger, so I had control over my body. I could stand in the ring and do a backflip—although I never needed to do that in the business. Everybody brought different things. Rick Rude was a national champion arm-wrestler. Scott Norton was a world champion arm-wrestler. The only one who didn't have skills was Hawk, but that worked fine. He had the perfect personality. He used to go to Patrick Henry High School, and he would joke, "Henry High School got beat 49 to nothin', but Hegstrand was 3-0 under the bleachers!" Eddie saw right away that he had natural charisma and you can't make it in this wrestling business without charisma.

I remember picking up Barry Darsow, Rick Rude, and Hawk in a 1978 two-door Honda Civic. The car weighed only about 760 pounds, and Barry and I alone were 700 pounds put together. Lo and behold, a piston did shoot through the hood of the car one time because it was too much weight. Thank God it was at the end of wrestling camp.

Q: Where did you actually wrestle your first match?

A: That took place in Georgia Championship Wrestling. I wrestled Randy Barber.

Q: I remember Randy Barber. He just died a couple of years ago, didn't he?

A: Yeah, he did, man. He'd give his body up and do anything for you. All he told me was, "Be one vicious S.O.B." I said okay. I knew nothing about working. I grabbed him by the neck and threw him in the corner by one hand. I just started beating the dog crap out of him. I did the finish and one of the fans yelled something at me. I shot him the bird,

Animal wraps up Hawk's ankle before a match. The two were more like brothers than mere friends.

"I remember picking up Barry Darsow, Rick Rude, and Hawk in a 1978 two-door Honda Civic. The car weighed only about 760 pounds, and Barry and I alone were 700 pounds put together."

right there on WTBS. It was a good thing it wasn't a live show. When I went to the back, Ole Anderson said, "You stupid [expletive]! Are you trying to get us kicked off this TV?" I said, "Hey, if somebody did that to me on the street, that would be my reaction!"

Q: Was it difficult having to learn so much while your star was rising so quickly?

A: They promoted us heavily, but they also gave us time to develop—and that doesn't happen today. Stan Hansen took us to the basement of the Civic Center in Canton, Ohio. He said, "Listen, you two musclebound idiots, you don't have to break our traps every time we lock up!" He turned to Hawk and said, "You, you're too stiff throwin' punches. I want you to hit the door of the bathroom there 50 times until you don't hit it and kill it!" Hawk started throwing punches at the door, his knuckles got bloody, and he finally started throwing punches the right way. And he looked like he was killing the door without even hitting it. That was old-school learning that we'll never have again.

Interview Photos by Jessica Laurinaitis

Unlike most manager/wrestler relationships, Ellering actually negotiated deals for the Warriors. There was brief period of time in 1983, however, when Animal and Hawk were not at all happy with "Precious" Paul and let him know it as only The Road Warriors can.

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

As big as The Road Warriors were in the United States, they were even bigger in Japan. Animal locks Genichiro Tenryu in a sleeper en route to winning the International tag team championship from Tenryu and Jumbo Tsuruta in 1983 (above). Not for public consumption, Hawk and Animal visit with popular Kensuke Sasaki and his not-so-happy son (below).

Q: It was funny when you wrestled in that small studio for the TV show. They played Black Sabbath for your entrance theme, but, only a few notes into the theme, not only were you already out there, but the match was already over with.

A: They actually did a cartoon about that in Japan. It was the Japanese version of Lipton Cup o' Soup and only took a couple of minutes to cook. The cartoon showed me fighting two guys and Hawk says, "Hey, Animal, soup's on!" I say, "Okay, Hawk," and boom I do the pin. But those quick matches weren't something that we necessarily wanted to do. The promotion wanted us to do that.

Q: Whose primary idea was that? Your whole gimmick, such as the quick matches, really broke the formula. Who was thinking outside the box?

A: "Precious" Paul Ellering helped us tremendously. We would sit down at Denny's, or usually Waffle House, and he would do napkin presentations, like business meetings. He would grab the napkin and say, "Okay, here's the ring, guys," and draw the four corners of the ring. "Hawk, you're this X over here. Animal, you're that X, and your opponent is over there." He helped us develop the philosophy of what we were trying to accomplish.

Here's another example. Paul said, "Animal, you can military-press 400 pounds behind your neck, so you could easily press-slam a human being over your head." That's when we started press-slamming people. I also

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

"[Stan Hansen] turned to Hawk and said, 'You, you're too stiff throwin' punches. I want you to hit the door of the bathroom there 50 times until you don't hit it and kill it!'"

did the powerslam, and some of the boys actually told me that I had one of the prettiest powerslams in the wrestling business. I got that from Buzz Sawyer. But Buzz would just do a half-twist and land the way the guy landed. I was strong enough to jump up in the air with the guy, twist around, tuck his head under so he wouldn't land on his head, and land him flat. I could do that because I continued powerlifting during my wrestling career to see how strong I could get.

Q: I think of what the jobbers must have gone through with some of those moves. You or Hawk would give somebody a clothesline, maybe Bill or Randy Mulkey, and you would put in that extra torque, and they would get their own centrifugal force going and do almost a full flip in the air.

A: I did a left-handed clothesline where I would throw somebody in, clap my hands together, and swing my arm like I was swinging a baseball bat—and my arm was about the same size as some guys' legs. As soon as I'd hit the Mulkeys, they'd flip around—they almost did it too good. The Orient Express, Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond. Pat Tanaka would do a backward flip with a full twist and land on his back. And the job guys … let's just say they earned every dollar.

Q: You mentioned Paul Ellering and his napkin sessions. Of course, he was your on-air manager. What was his relationship to you outside the ring?

A: Paul was probably the only true manager at the time—most other managers were just for show. When other companies were interested in us, like Joe Blanchard in San Antonio or Don Owen in Portland or Bill Watts in the UWF, we would give Paul the phone. He would handle the price, the hotel and flight, and he would give us our itinerary for the month. We had the Minnesota connection with Paul, too, and we became very good friends. When it came time to negotiate guaranteed contracts, we made sure Paul got a good contract for doing that.

Q: Did he use any of the knowledge he gained from *The Wall Street Journal* to invest any money for you?

A: No, but Paul would sit there with his protractor and compass and gauge future investments. On empty flights, he'd have graph paper out across three trays, graphing where he thought the market would go. When the stock market crashed in the late-'80s, guys like Dory and Terry Funk called Ellering to ask what they should do, and he said to get their money out. Paul is a member of Mensa (high IQ society), you know.

Q: People knew Paul Ellering was smart, but he was long underrated in the toughness department. In recent years, we've learned about his passion for dog sledding and that he competed in the Iditarod. Didn't something go wrong with his eye the last time?

A: His eye almost froze. Paul blew out his knees in back-to-back years while working for Bill Watts. It was smart to put Paul with us. It was such a contrast in style. Paul talked very educated and had the dyed blond hair. And we were, "We're going to kick your teeth down your throat!" But Paul was a national champion powerlifter. He deadlifted 745 pounds, and you're talking 1976. I remember he did step-ups for an hour on WTBS to show he was in better shape than anyone else in the company.

When The Road Warriors debuted in Georgia, they were, according to Animal, star-struck by the likes of Tommy Rich. They got over that quickly.

The Road Warriors are intent on giving "Wildfire" a beating, and there is very little Jerry Lawler can do to prevent it.

Q: Was Bob Backlund trying to keep up with Paul Ellering? I remember he did something similar on TV.

A: That was one of Bob's old tricks, and Paul did it sometime after that. Speaking of the Iditarod, I drove out to Paul's farm in northern Minnesota. He had all 30 of his sled dogs out there. Whenever one of the local farmers had a bad cow or calf that died, they would give it to Paul, he'd throw the head to a bunch of dogs and throw something else to some other dogs, and they'd clean that cow spotless. In the summertime when we were up there, I'd watch him bring out this four-wheeler, and, as soon as he turned the key, those dogs would get so excited because they knew they were going to pull. That's what is bred into those dogs. He put the four-wheeler in neutral and they pulled us all around.

Q: Do you talk very often these days?

A: Not a lot. His kids are older and have graduated from high school. I try to do personal appearances with Paul whenever possible. We'd love to do more. But it's hard for people to get hold of Paul. We could be doing appearances every weekend.

Q: When did you and Hawk realize that you had something really special as a tag team, not just chemistry, but a concept that was going to change the way things were done?

A: It was hard at the beginning because we didn't realize we were being put in the top spot when we first went to TBS and got the belts. We were more intimidated in the locker room than the other guys were. We watched wrestling on cable like everyone else, and now, all of a sudden, we're in the locker room with Tito Santana, Paul Orndorff, Sgt. Slaughter, Buzz Sawyer, Tommy Rich, Dusty Rhodes, and Stan Hansen. I'm going, "Holy s__, it's Tommy Rich!" But we tried not to show that. Georgia Championship Wrestling was in the dumps, but then we started selling out houses and going to bigger cities, like Baltimore and Washington, D.C. I knew something special was going on.

Q: And Georgia Championship Wrestling began going into Ohio, Michigan ...

A: Yeah, we did the run. Hawk and I, at one stretch, wrestled for 80 days without a day off. We wrestled between 275 and 300 days per year. We would do TV on WTBS and sometimes would have to run through the airport with our bags in our face-paint and our chaps—the whole gimmick—and fly to Columbus, Ohio, which was our main base. Then we'd rent a car and do the loop through Wheeling, Huntington, Cleveland, over to Detroit, and then hit Toledo, Canton, and Cincinnati, on the way back and hit Columbus on the last day. Basically, we'd do a week in the Georgia area and then do a week up in the Ohio Valley area. It was back and forth nonstop, and then come back on an early flight on Saturday to do TV again.

Q: Just imagine you and Hawk in full garb trying to get through airports today. The TSA would pull you to the side.

"Paul was probably the only true manager at the time—most other managers were just for show. When other companies were interested in us ... we would give Paul the phone."

A: We'd never make it with all those bags. Some of those elderly people on the plane would see us with those chaps, big muscles, and faces painted, and they thought we were the second coming of the Devil.

Q: What strengths did you bring to the team, compared to Hawk?

A: We both could do great interviews, but Hawk really had the gift of gab. Hawk could come up with crazy crap. I would look at him during an interview and just crack up. He would get mad at me for laughing. Hawk threw great punches and he was great at coming off the top rope with our finisher, the Doomsday Device. I took pride in knowing the business end of the business. I knew what every person in the ring had to do during the whole match. I knew what my high spots were with my guys, and I knew what Hawk's high spots were with his guys. I knew where the referee had to be and I knew the finish. There were times when Hawk might've had a few too many belts the night before and he'd look at me starry-eyed, like "Animal, where am I?" I'd say, "Hawk, go over to the ropes, duck some clotheslines, get something else on him, and tag me." I learned that from Paul Ellering, and I'm anal like that anyway.

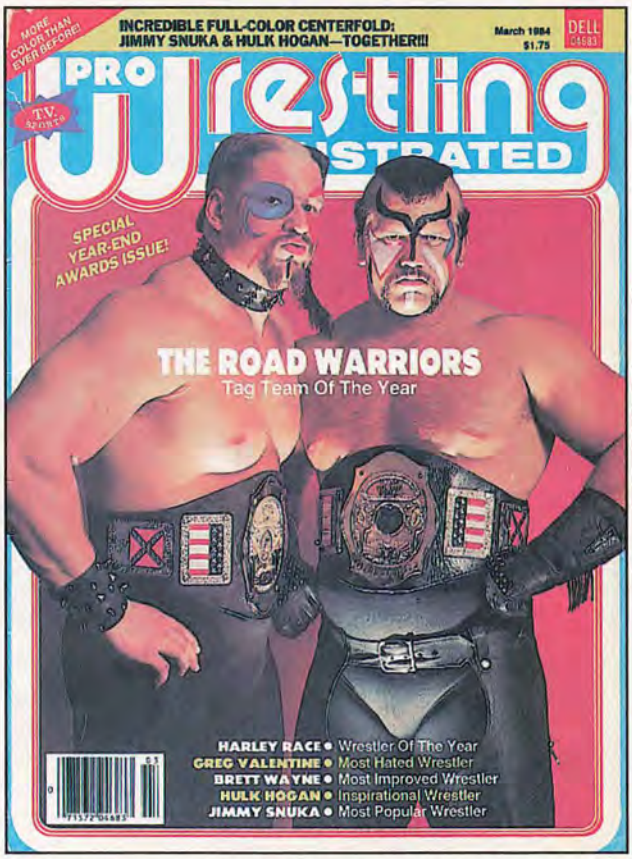
Q: There has been some criticism of The Road Warrior style. Steamrolling your opponents and appearing invincible went against the grain with a lot of old-timers. I recently did an interview with Baron Von Raschke (Volume 37, 2011), and he said he got along with you guys very well, but there was some tension between you and Crusher, where he didn't understand what you guys were doing. Address the no-selling charge.

A: When Baron popped his claw on me, I sold it like he was squishing my skull because that was my job—and Baron would probably attest to that. I don't know why Crusher would complain because when he threw me in the ropes, he'd just stand there and I'd have to run into both of his thumbs—the Double Barrel, as he called it, which was a ridiculous move—but it was popular and the fans loved to see it. I took his bolo punch, too. If there was friction with Crusher, I think it was because he was the strongman of the Midwest for 25 years and this was the changing of the guard.

Q: Yes, he was the *cham-peen* of the saloon, as he would say.

A: Yeah, yeah—with a big cigar and a chair hangin' around his neck. But we took the business where it needed to go. Do I have respect for Crusher? Absolutely. When I was training for wrestling at the gym, he came in with a suit and benched 500 pounds—and he was nearly 60 years old! I also have the ultimate respect for his son, Larry, who was a referee. I don't think Crusher had the problem with us as much as the old-

Even in the company of legends like Buddy Rogers and Regis Philbin, Animal wouldn't break character. There was an aura surrounding The Road Warriors that was every bit as valuable to them as their brutal wrestling style.



The Road Warriors won their first of three straight *PWI* Tag Team of the Year awards in 1983. The cover photo of the March 1984 issue, taken by Bill Apter, is Animal's all-time favorite.

time boys like Bobby Heenan who were giving him s__ on the way back. Ordinarily we were babyfaces, but out of respect, we came out to the ring first when we wrestled Crusher and Bruiser in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The people went crazy when they heard "Ironman." All of a sudden, there was this polka music and the people went absolutely nuts. I turned to Hawk and I asked, "Am I hearing this right? Are they going crazy over the polka?"

Q: You knew you were in a different territory then.

A: Oh, boy, I'm telling you. As soon as the bell rang, I kicked Bruiser in the belly, Hawk kicked Crusher in the belly, and we both press-slammed them over our heads. These were two guys who had never been off their feet. They didn't know what was going on because they didn't know where we were going with it. But kayfabe was so big that we never got a chance to show them what we were going to do beforehand. For example, back in those days, you would get fired if you rode back and forth with the guys you were supposed to wrestle that night.

Q: Fans expected the steamroll. When wrestling fans like me found out you were going to the AWA and that Baron Von Raschke and Crusher were the tag team champions, we figured they might as well put up two cardboard cut-outs against you guys.

A: Yeah (laughs). That was the way the business depicted us and needed us to be. All the promoters knew that wouldn't change overnight, so they let us have that five-year period of dominating everybody with the idea that we would be turned babyface eventually.

Q: It's what the fans wanted.

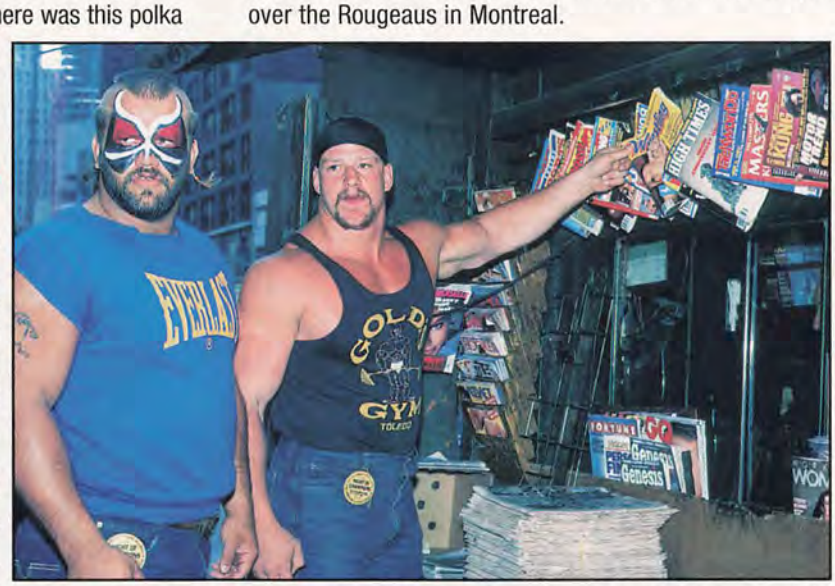
A: That's what Ellering taught us. If the fans expect this, then you give them this. When we wrestled quality opponents like Larry and Curt Hennig, and the fans saw us reel and fall back, the fans thought they might be able to beat The Road Warriors—and then we'd come out on top in the end. There was no other way to do it.

Q: I remember when one of you guys did lose, it was astounding. I'll mention a famous example, and that was Hawk vs. Tim Horner when Horner came out of nowhere and rolled up Hawk for the pin. That crowd in the studio was in shock.

A: And then we both went into the ring because we wanted to kill Tim Horner. But that was all the perception we wanted to create.

Q: The fans feared for Tim Horner's life!

A: That was the biggest misconception about Hawk and me: The Road Warriors are difficult to deal with and they don't want to do jobs or get beat. When I looked back over time while writing this book, we actually got beat several times in different territories, especially when we were leaving a territory. We dropped the belts to Steve Regal and Jim Garvin in the AWA. It wasn't about whether we would do jobs. We put the local guy over in every territory. We put over the Rougeaus in Montreal.



Animal and Hawk took a walking tour of Manhattan prior to the NWA's debut card at the Meadowlands Arena in New Jersey in 1984. Had the cover of *Inside Wrestling* featured a pair of war-painted sadists, perhaps Hawk would have plunked down some cash.

"I took pride in knowing the business end of the business. I knew what every person in the ring had to do during the whole match. I knew what my high spots were with my guys, and I knew what Hawk's high spots were with his guys. I knew where the referee had to be and I knew the finish."

Q: I think everyone did a job to the Rougeaus in Montreal at some point. Even Hulk Hogan lost to Jacques there.

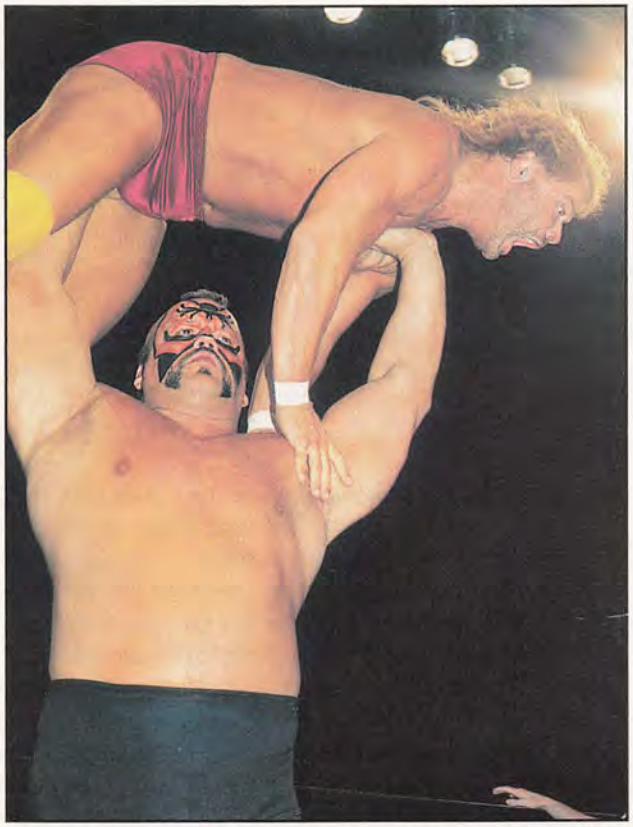
A: Yeah, the Rougeaus were like a royal family. Here's a story: Haku (King Tonga) was in Montreal and he was one of the biggest heels I've ever seen. Haku would have to knock down five guys just on his way down to the ring. We had beaten Jacques bloody in the ring, and now comes Haku. Everybody thinks he's going to join The Road Warriors and totally break this guy's neck. He's punching people down on the way to the ring. Haku jumps in the ring, and I have Rougeau by the back of his hair with one arm spread and Hawk also has him by the hair with the other arm spread. Haku takes a split-second look, gives me a thrust kick to the chops, and I go over the top rope. He gives Hawk a thrust kick and he goes over the rope. Before that, we had never gone off our feet in Montreal. When Haku and the Rougeaus did that angle with us—are you kidding me? That was three summers' worth of money. We sold out everywhere, including the Montreal Forum. That's why I used to get irritated when people would say The Road Warriors don't want to do jobs. That was never the case. Whenever a promoter asked us to do the favor, we did it.

Q: We have to touch on Japan a bit. It's kind of hard to explain how hugely over you were there. Could you describe that? And could you address whether it really was a stiffer style of wrestling?

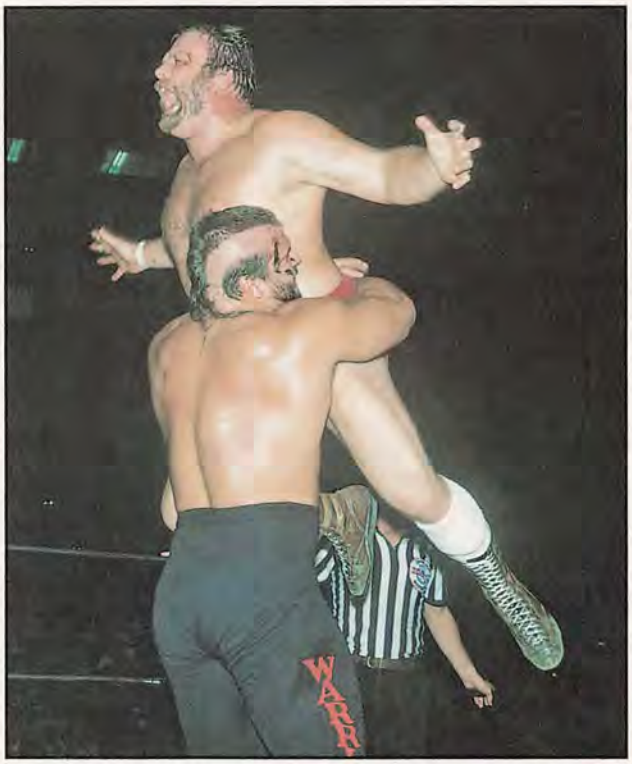
A: Japan at the time was the ultimate place to go. That was our release valve over the years. Japanese cameras followed us for two years before we finally agreed to go. They filmed us drinking full bottles of Tabasco and making pretend we were eating raw chicken out of trashcans. One time, Hawk ate 16 raw eggs in the shell just to show the Japanese public that we were two versions of Godzilla. Wrestling over there really was a competition between the U.S. and Japan. I remember coming off the bus and getting a key chain that read, "Peace—No More War—Hiroshima." My heart went out to these people, but we had a job to do. When we first went to All-Japan, Giant Baba told us to not sign autographs, take pictures, talk to people, or even shake hands. He had spent over a year showing footage of us mauling everybody. And our first match there was a two-out-of-three-falls International tag team title bout with Jumbo Tsuruta and Tenryru.

Q: Oh, yes, a legendary team.

A: Are you kidding? We had never done a two-out-of-three-falls match in our life! We beat them in about five minutes in the first fall, went to a draw in the second fall, and we



Pressing wrestlers like Stan Lane over his head came as naturally to Animal as doing it with weights. But there was for more to the Warriors' game than just muscle.



Animal gives a big, old hug to Ole Anderson, the man who once chastised him for giving the finger to a derisive fan.

got DQ'd in the third fall, giving them the win and allowing them to retain the belts. As far as the style went, it was very physical. Hawk and I liked it better. Probably one of the biggest wars we ever had was working with Harley Race and Stan Hansen. Oh, Lord, we had a falls-count-anywhere streetfight with those guys. We were all over that building, fighting in the upper balconies and slamming each other on the bleachers. Three out of four of us were bleeding—not purposefully, but by accident.

Q: I remember seeing you against Ivan Koloff and The Russian Assassin live in one of those scaffold matches. Sometimes those matches were criticized because you couldn't do a whole lot on the scaffold. But seeing it live was far more impressive because I could truly appreciate that long drop. Did you have any close calls with that?

A: I was scared to death up there, to be honest with you. After about 100 of them, I got used to it and I started throwing dropkicks like an idiot, because I knew my own body. Here's how much respect the boys had for each other in the business. Our original opponents were supposed to be The Powers of Pain, Barbarian and Warlord. I got Terry [Szopinski], who was Warlord, in the wrestling business. Terry came to me and said, "Joe, we don't feel right falling off that scaffold. That's 30 feet in the air, and, if we fall, we're going to blow something out and hurt ourselves very badly—and we're thinking about going to the WWF." I said, "Terry, we're friends first and foremost, and, if you guys don't want to do it, don't do it. Go to New York. You're not hurting our feelings, man, because, I'll tell you what, I am *never* falling off that scaffold!"

Q: Everybody remembers Jim Cornette. He went off the scaffold at Starrcade.

A: That was the funniest thing I've ever seen. We had the match with Bobby [Eaton] and Dennis [Condrey]. Bobby fell 25 feet, landed on his hip, and never got hurt—he was one tough son of a gun. I chased Jim Cornette and I was actually holding onto Jim Cornette's arm. I wouldn't let him go because Jimmy had no strength and wouldn't be able to hold himself hanging onto the scaffold like that. Big Bossman, Big Bubba Rogers at the time, was supposed to catch him. I'm looking down at Bossman, and, if you can't see it on the video, I'm yelling, "Are you ready? Are you ready?" Bubba yelled in his high-pitched voice, "Yeah, I'm ready!" Jimmy Cornette says, "He's ready, let me go." Bubba's got his arms out, but Cornette lands two feet away from Bubba. Both of his knees blew out immediately. Bubba carried Cornette in his arms to the back like he was a baby. He had to get both his knees scoped the next day. Oh, yeah, he was so messed up.

Q: I suppose the only thing tougher than scaffold matches were all those back-to-back War Games. Were they grueling or what?

A: The War Games were brutal because they were 45-minute matches. Everybody hated it. And everybody hated the fact that Hawk didn't have to come in until last.

Q: Usually Arn Anderson was the first one in.

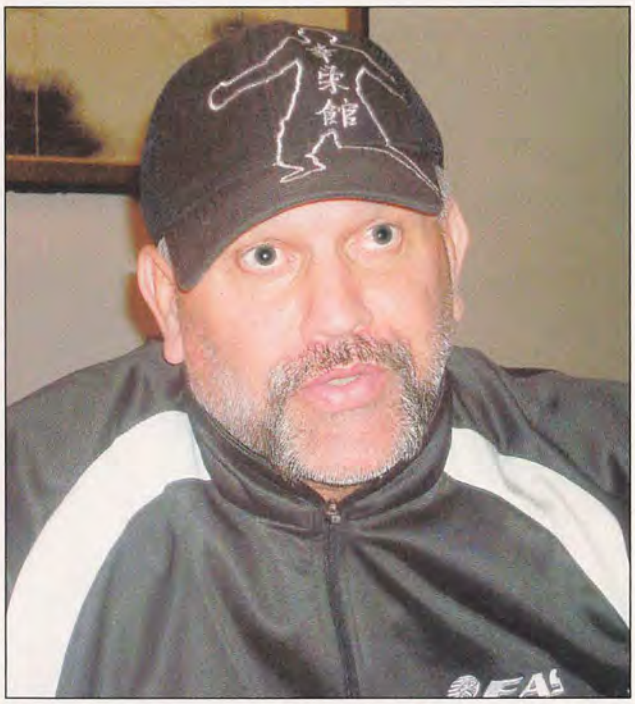
A: Yeah, but Hawk would be the last one, and, man oh man, he'd knock out Tully with a clothesline, Arn with a clothesline, and Luger with a clothesline. He'd get all the cheers and pops. What people don't realize is there was about a foot-and-a-half gap between the two rings, which were side by side. Hawk and I came up with a great idea: Let's just hit the ropes and we'll do double flying shoulder tackles across both rings. It was a good seven- or eight-foot dive. We did it to Tully and Arn and got the biggest cheers.

Q: What amazed me is that it was such a brutal type of match, but it included guys who didn't ordinarily wrestle, such as J.J. Dillon and Paul Ellering. It had to be tough on them.

A: When we wrestled the first one, we felt really bad because we dislocated J.J.'s shoulder. The office told us to give J.J. our finish. Well, the cage was only about 6½ feet high. There was no way I could get J.J. up on my shoulders and have Hawk fly off the top turnbuckle in such a way that J.J. could've landed flat and not got hurt. I lifted J.J. up in a side suplex type of deal, and, before I even had him up, Hawk was coming off the rope already, so we dropped him real quick and separated his shoulder by accident. It was not done on purpose, man, because we had the ultimate respect for J.J.

Q: Of course, The Road Warriors won just about every accolade possible: the three world tag team titles in the U.S., the titles in Japan, and, I suppose I'll plug our

"That was the biggest misconception about Hawk and me: The Road Warriors are difficult to deal with and they don't want to do jobs or get beat ... We actually got beat several times in different territories, especially when we were leaving a territory."



own magazines, you were a four-time *PWI* Tag Team of the Year. Was there anything that you wanted to do that you didn't?

A: We should've won that award about 15 years in a row.

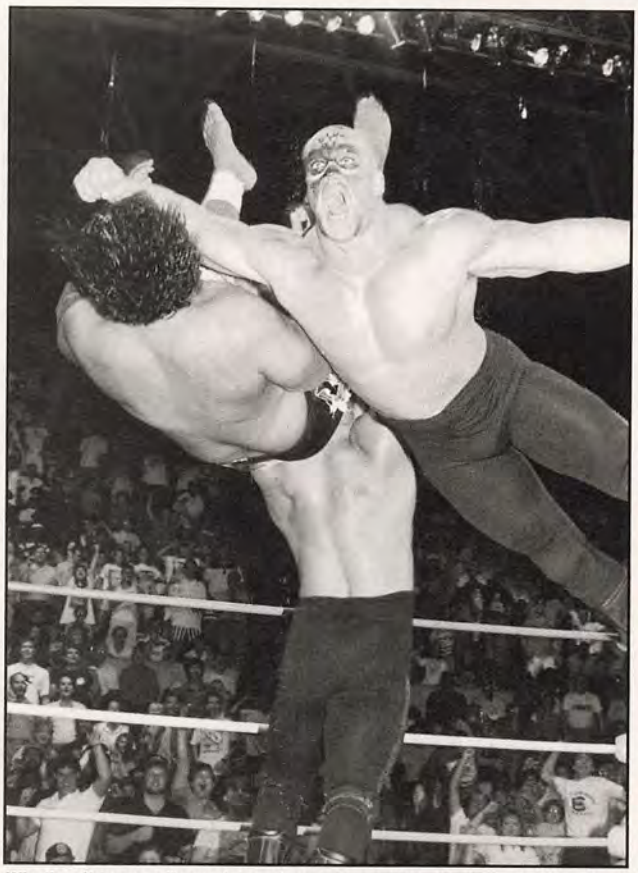
Q: But it was three consecutive times from 1983 to '85, and then again in '88, so that's pretty good. You probably remember that really cool cover shot of you and Hawk on the March 1984 issue of *PWI*. In my opinion, it was our best cover of all-time.

A: That was the best cover shot I've ever seen—and I mention it in my book.

Q: I assume that you guys won every title that was on your list.

A: Yes. And it's hardly ever mentioned that we won championships in Australia and Mexico. In Japan, we were the International tag team champions. I'm sure you have pictures of us with those old belts with the little chains hanging from them. I told Giant Baba that he should let us make those belts among the top titles in the United States, and that's why we came to Crockett with those belts. We challenged the NWA World heavyweight tag team champions The Russians, and put up our belts against theirs.

The Road Warriors began a 400-day reign after winning the AWA World tag team championship from The Crusher and Baron Von Raschke in August 1984 (inset). In a recent WRESTLER interview, Von Raschke (locked up by Hawk while Crusher observes from the apron, below) complained that The Road Warriors refused to "sell."



Whether it be on offense (above) or defense (below), The Road Warriors' teamwork was unmatched in the ferocity department.

Q: I recall that was unheard of at the time. Many casual fans who didn't read the magazines didn't really think about Japan. And when The Road Warriors all of a sudden came here with belts from Japan, it really meant something.

A: Our deal was, "Hey, we're from Japan where the men are men and most of the women are, too!" Just kidding. I love Japan and I'd do a ceremonial Road Warrior Animal retirement show in a heartbeat. I'm trying to get in touch with Riki Choshu with New Japan about that. I wouldn't be working, but would paint myself up and do the retirement show. So, yeah, I feel very fortunate that we won every accolade you could possibly list. But at the same time, I knew this business was a work, so I appreciated everything and didn't take anything for granted, that's for sure.

Q: Did you ever assume that the Road Warrior tag team might run its course one day, and did you have aspirations to be a singles wrestler?

A: No, no, man. Even as frustrating as it got at the 1991 SummerSlam at Wembley Stadium, when Hawk was suspended for failing another drug test, never once did I consider it—although I received offers to go single. And then he went and tagged up with Kensuke Sasaki shortly after that without really asking me *(laughs)*.

Q: The Hell-Raisers.

A: Yeah, that slapped me in the face. I had said no to doing that in the WWF. And there were about 10 shots, including in Japan and Kuwait, I had to honor for the WWF after Hawk was suspended. He wanted me to quit and go to Japan right away. I said no, and we'd talk about it after I got back. In the meantime, the Japanese office talked him into teaming with Kensuke as The Hell-Raisers, which really disappointed me. But I got hurt in Japan, anyway, when The Beverly Brothers gave me a double-suplex and ended up with two herniated discs. I had to wrestle handicap matches because Hawk wasn't there. So I took some time off and Hawk went and did the Hell-Raiser thing.

Q: I think most fans figured Animal was done, and The Road Warriors were finished forever. Did you always plan to come back?

A: That's the way we portrayed it. We didn't want any of the dirt to come out. We just said Animal is hurt and we don't know if he'll ever wrestle again while Hawk did his thing.

Q: Did you begin your comeback in the U.S. or Japan?

A: When I first came back, I was in Japan, almost like a manager, and walked Kensuke and Hawk to the ring when they wrestled Steiner and Norton. When people saw me, I was about 290 pounds and in the best shape I'd been in for a long time. They knew Animal was back, man. I grabbed the microphone and said, "Next time I come over here, I'll be kickin' some serious Japanese butt!" We worked it that way and it got over huge. I was getting calls for months from Hawk and the Japanese, asking if I was okay and asking if I was ready. We finally went out and did it.

"I feel very fortunate that we won every accolade you could possibly list. But at the same time, I knew this business was a work, so I appreciated everything and didn't take anything for granted, that's for sure."

Q: How long were you out?

A: We were apart about two or three years.

Q: I think that's what made it believable *(laughs).*

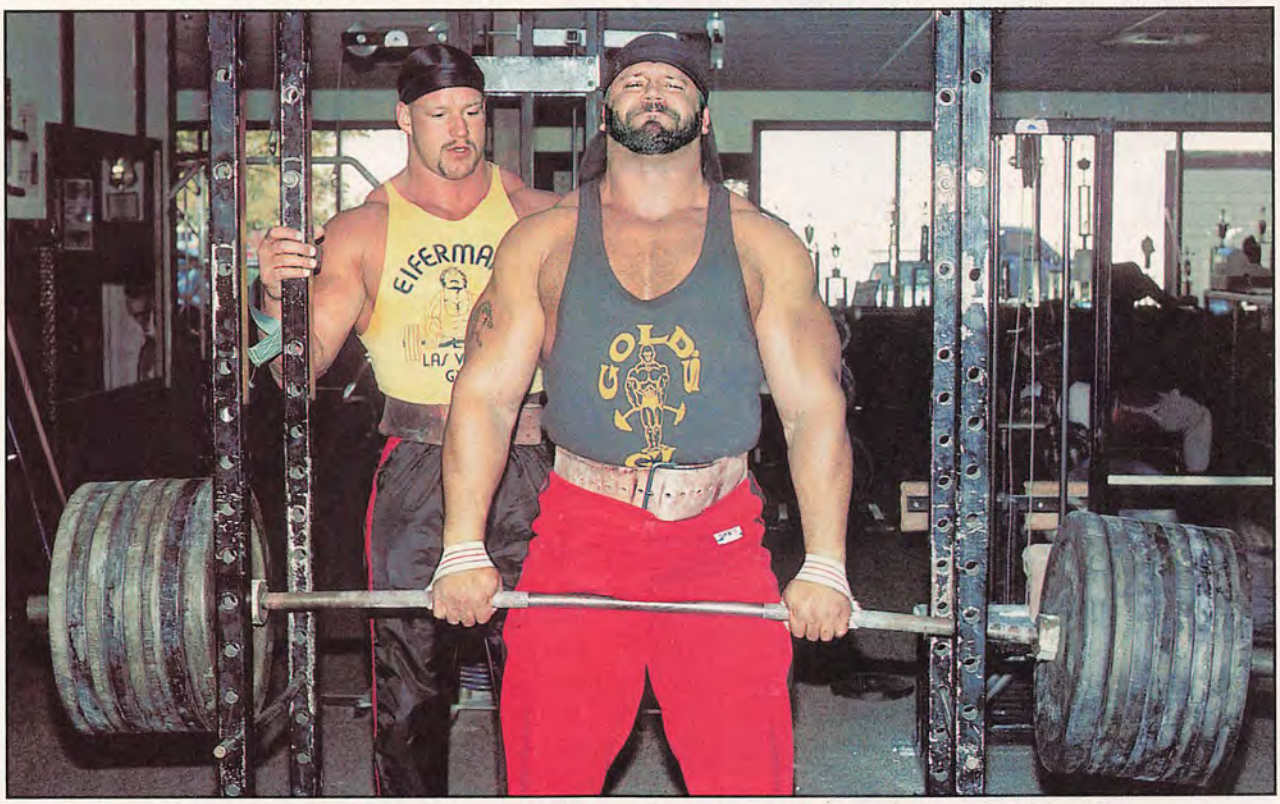
A: You're probably right.

Q: Of course, you and Hawk reunited and eventually returned to the WWF, where they did the angle with Hawk, mocking his alcohol and drug abuse ...

A: I hated the whole thing. The deal with Hawk falling off the TitanTron, doing the drug thing, coming to the ring with his makeup all messed up, and drunk ... it hit too close to home. I firmly believe it was done on purpose to give a jab back at Hawk. Now that I think of it, if I'm a promoter and I'm putting hundreds of thousands of dollars into promoting you and you don't respect us and keep failing drug tests, then I'd be pissed off, too. But at the same time, I thought it was a low blow and should've never happened to Hawk like that. In the beginning, they wanted me to be the one with the problem. I said I wasn't doing it because I had three little kids. I had to go to parent-teacher meetings. Hawk said he would do it, and I think they knew he'd do it all along anyway. I didn't like the whole theatrics of it.

Q: How was Hawk at that point? Was he fairly clean and sober?

A: No, he had problems.



Animal and Hawk met at a gym and spent most of their free time in similar establishments. Here, Animal does shoulder shrugs with 865 pounds on the bar.

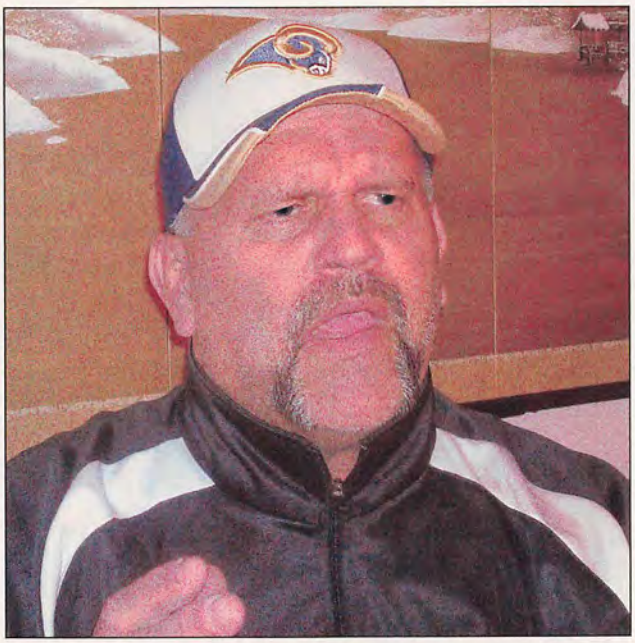
It looks as if Animal is giving Curt Hennig a little kiss on the head. Believe us, he wasn't!

Stan Hansen once got on Hawk's case for throwing stiff punches. He cured the young wrestler of that fault in a rather unique way. A couple of years later, the Warriors escort Mr. Hansen and his bullrope out of the ring.

Q: Then you guys left and came back a third time, shortly before Hawk's death. I remember you had a match against Rob Van Dam and Kane on TV and there was a lot of talk about The Road Warriors coming back full-time.

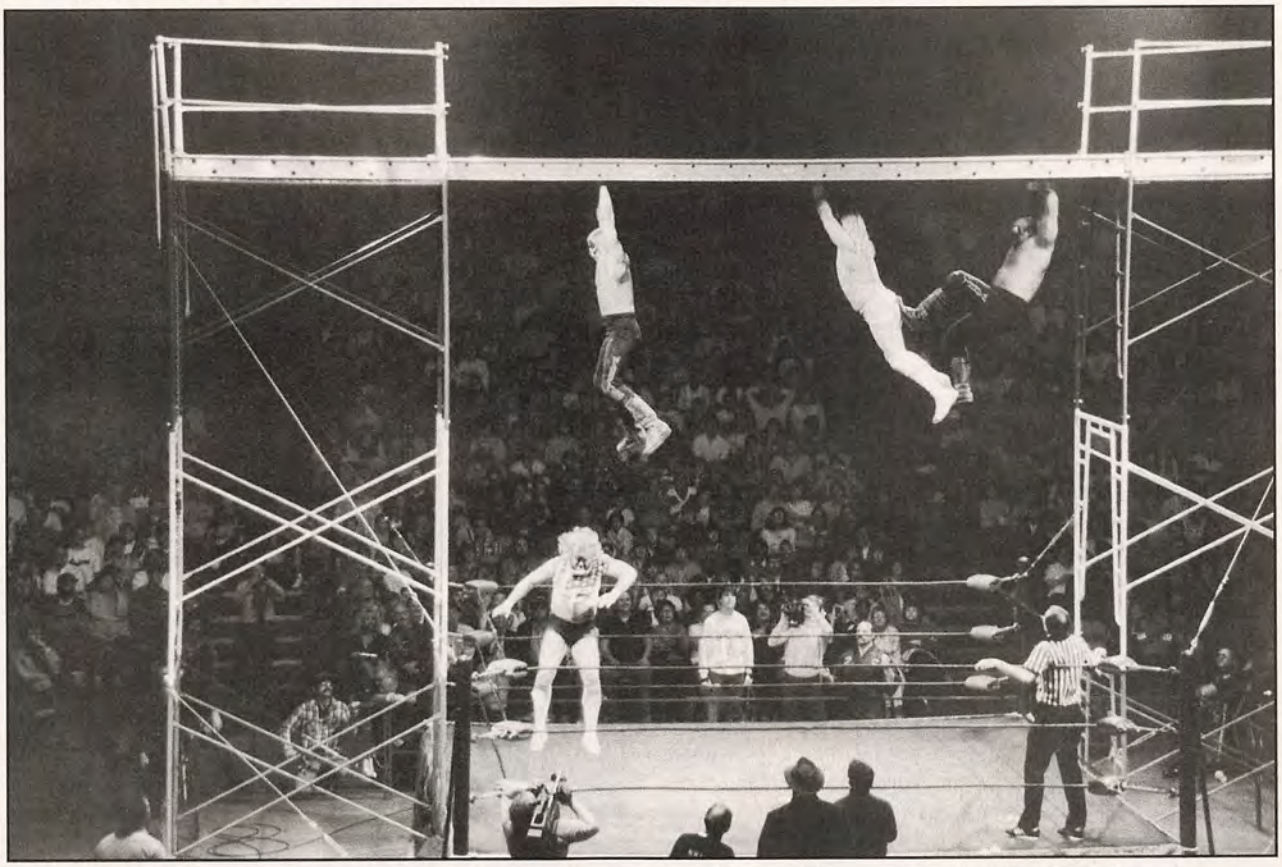
A: They pulled us in for that one match. Of course, we were there because there were no other tag teams in the wrestling business and they were dubbing Rob Van Dam and Kane as the greatest team ever. We got a standing ovation in Philadelphia that night. We had a great match. Van Dam went to do a spin kick, I caught him in mid-air and powerbombed him—the whole works. In my opinion, and in the opinion of many others in the wrestling business at the time, they should have given us the title that night and we could've had a two-year run with those guys. Instead, Hawk got a little bit of heat for doing a no-sell on Van Dam's finish. That was totally untrue. Hawk did a great sell on it. Maybe he didn't lie there and die like some people would, but we've always sold for main-event guys or even guys they were trying to build. But we knew the rule on TV was to get out of the ring as soon as possible because they've got to clean the mat for the next match. Hawk just rolled over and got up. So that made a bit of a stink. The accusation didn't make sense, either, because Hawk volunteered to do the job for Rob. Why would he volunteer to do the job for Rob and no-sell it? At that particular time in Hawk's life, he had changed his life around and wanted to prove that to the office. But they just never gave us a chance to prove ourselves. Shortly after that, he passed away.

"Hawk was like my brother. I was with him more than any of my family members for 20 years. I broke down right there on my stairs next to my pool and cried like a baby."



Q: What was your reaction to Hawk's death? You said he was clean and sober, so this was obviously something you didn't see coming.

A: Several of us—including Beefcake, Hennig, Hawk, and I—had gone to Australia for an event promoted by Kiss' band manager. So we're in Melbourne, Australia, getting ready to go to the ring, and I look over and see my partner on the floor. I could see his left pec moving up and down. I asked the trainer what was wrong. He said Hawk had a resting pulse rate of 188. They rushed him to the hospital, I did the match that night, and went to see him in the hospital. Next I had to go to Adelaide, a tourist destination in Australia, and Hawk called me up about a day-and-a-half later. "You've got to get me out of here. I'm not dyin' in this frickin' country." I asked him what was wrong. He said, "Two guys died in the last 10 hours of the same thing I have." I firmly believe the only reason Hawk lived is because his wife Dale's father, is one of the more prominent heart surgeons in Florida. He called Hawk's doctor in Australia and they put him on a different regimen of meds. I could hear the nurse yelling, "Sir, you can't leave!" He said, "Ma'am, I've got a 320-pound partner that'll be comin' over here with a bandana on, and there's no way you're stoppin' him."



Scaffold matches terrified Animal, but after wrestling so many of them, well, he was still terrified. But he and Hawk rarely lost. Having Hawk dispose of Dennis Condrey, Animal sends Bobby Eaton on his way with a boot to the butt.

It wasn't until 1990 that Hawk and Animal, now using their sobriquet The Legion of Doom exclusively, brought their talents to the WWF. Animal shows off his agility, nailing Irving R. Schyster with a dropkick at SummerSlam '92.

That's exactly what I did. I flew from Adelaide to Melbourne, picked him up, we flew to Sydney, and then we landed at LAX. I walked him all the way to the gate for the flight to Tampa, and I went back to Minneapolis. We didn't do much together for a while. Then we started doing stuff with Ted DiBiase for the Power Wrestling Alliance and some other Christian events.

At about that time, Hawk told me that his wife, Dale, and he were going to be moving from a condominium on the beach to a regular house. They were tired of sandstorms hitting the windows and taking off paint, and there would be a little more privacy in the house than in the condo. So Hawk moved all the real heavy furniture with a buddy of his, and he had to carry them down I don't know how many flights of stairs because there were no elevators. Later, Dale was unpacking dishes out of boxes in the kitchen. Hawk said, "Honey, I'm wiped out. I'm going to lay down for about three or four hours and I'll come back to help you out." That was about 12:00. About 4:00 came around, and he hadn't come down yet. She went up and he was already gone.

I talked to him earlier that day, and he was supposed to call me back. Finally, Bob Mulrenin, a friend of ours who used to be George Napolitano's photographer, called me at about 2:00 the next afternoon. He said, "Joe, how's it goin'?" I said, "Good, man. Why wouldn't I be okay? What's up?" At the time I was vacuuming my pool. Bob asked, "Has anybody called you? Have you talked to Mike or anything?" I said no. He said, "Joe, Mike died last night." Hawk was like my brother. I was with him more than any of my family members for 20 years. I broke down right there on my stairs next to my pool and cried like a baby. It was one of the most brutal things I've ever had to go through.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah, man, it was pretty heavy. At the funeral, I heard from some of the guys that worked out with Hawk that he was going to a heart specialist. I don't even think he told his wife he was seeing a heart specialist. It's that race of life, man. It's not how you run that race, but how you finish. And Hawk finished that race of life real strong. He was clean for a few years there. He was sowing seeds, trying to help young people make the proper decisions in their life.

Q: It had to be a strange sensation for you to read all those obituaries and tributes to Mike because, basically, it was an obituary of The Road Warriors. Did it give you some insight into how you would be remembered, if something happened to you tomorrow?

A: I stayed away from reading a lot of the obituaries. At the time, I just couldn't handle it emotionally. I remember Mike called me and asked if I could join him for a personal appearance. I said I couldn't go. He said, "Why can't you go, man? We need the money." I told him I was going to an event in Arizona, the Athletes International Ministries convention. I said it's a Christian thing, you won't want to go. He called me back and said, "Dale and I were talking about getting some spirituality in our life, and we'd like to go."

Here's a sight I'll never forget from the event. I saw Hawk and Shawn Michaels on their knees together, crying like babies, asking the Lord for His forgiveness. A few years before that Hawk had choked Shawn Michaels out in Milan, Italy. Here they were together shortly afterward. It was an incredible sight to see two men let down their guard and do that, and they were friends ever since. It was a great momentum-changer in Hawk's life.

Q: Was it hard for you to continue as a wrestler without Hawk? I'm thinking specifically of when you were teaming with Jon Heidenreich for a while.

Determined to help the younger talent as his career wound down in 2005, Animal teamed with John Heidenreich, and, using The Road Warriors' preferred finisher, the Doomsday Device, they beat M-N-M for the WWE tag team championship.

"I agreed to do this thing with Heidenreich because I thought it was a way for me to get in the office end of the business. They gave us the belts, but the problem was Jon Heidenreich didn't keep his end of the bargain."

A: I had made the decision not to ever tag up with anybody else. But when it comes to my son James, my daughter Jessica, and my son Joe, I'm a coach by nature. My objective was to get a job behind the scenes in WWE helping develop young talent. So I agreed to do this thing with Heidenreich because I thought it was a way for me to get in the office end of the business. I compared Heidenreich to Hawk because both were loose cannons. They gave us the belts, but the problem was Jon Heidenreich didn't keep his end of the bargain. I won't say I completely blame him because Katrina hit, and all of his family was in Metairie, New Orleans, and Mississippi. He was afraid everybody was dead, including his kids and wife, so he left. He was going through a lot of emotional times while I was almost kind of blessing him by making him the new member of The Legion of Doom. There were a lot of guys in the back who were pissed off because they would've loved that opportunity to be a member of The Legion of Doom.

Q: Tell me about your wife and children.

A: I've been married to Julia for 25 years. My son Joe joined the Army after 9/11 and was in one of the first engineering battalions in Iraq. Jessica was an all-state hockey player in high school and now she's studying interior design. My son James was the first high school football player from Minnesota to be drafted to Ohio State. He made the consensus All-American team. Bill Fralic, Herschel Walker, Hugh Green, and Bo Jackson have been named to that team. Now he's a linebacker with St. Louis Rams.

Q: You must be proud of all of them.

A: Absolutely.

Q: One final question: If somehow The Road Warriors could come back today, whose butts would you have liked to kick one more time?

A: As Hawk would say, "Line 'em up!" I think Hawk and I could've lasted as a full-time team well into 2005 or 2006. Look at Hogan and Flair. They've kept going even though they're hitting 60! But we didn't need to keep going. We'll go down as the greatest tag team of all-time. Nobody can take that away from us. □

Photo by Jessica Laurinaitis

Photo by Jessica Laurinaitis

Joe Laurinaitis is proud of all three of his children. James, the 35th overall pick in the 2009 NFL Draft, has made 235 tackles from his middle linebacker position in his two years (above). "We'll keep you guys away from Uncle Paul," Joe assures his dogs, Ellie and Bronko (right).

KINGS OF WRESTLING

"ANY TALK OF ALL-TIME GREATS HAS TO INCLUDE US"

TEXT BY AL CASTLE

WHILE WAITING IN Los Angeles' LAX Airport for a flight home following a January Ring of Honor event, Chris Hero stopped at a Hudson News newsstand and perused the magazine rack for some in-flight reading.

He skimmed the sports section and noticed THE WRESTLER magazine—its cover largely obscured by another magazine but for the bottom right corner. He read the headline: "Is It Too Soon To Mention Them Among The All-Time Greats?"

"For a second there, I thought, *Finally, The Kings of Wrestling get some press*," said Hero, who recalled then picking up the magazine. He did so only to find out that the cover image did not feature him and his partner, Claudio Castagnoli. Rather, it was a photo of Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin, holding the TNA tag team championship belts.

"Give me a break already. All I hear about is how The

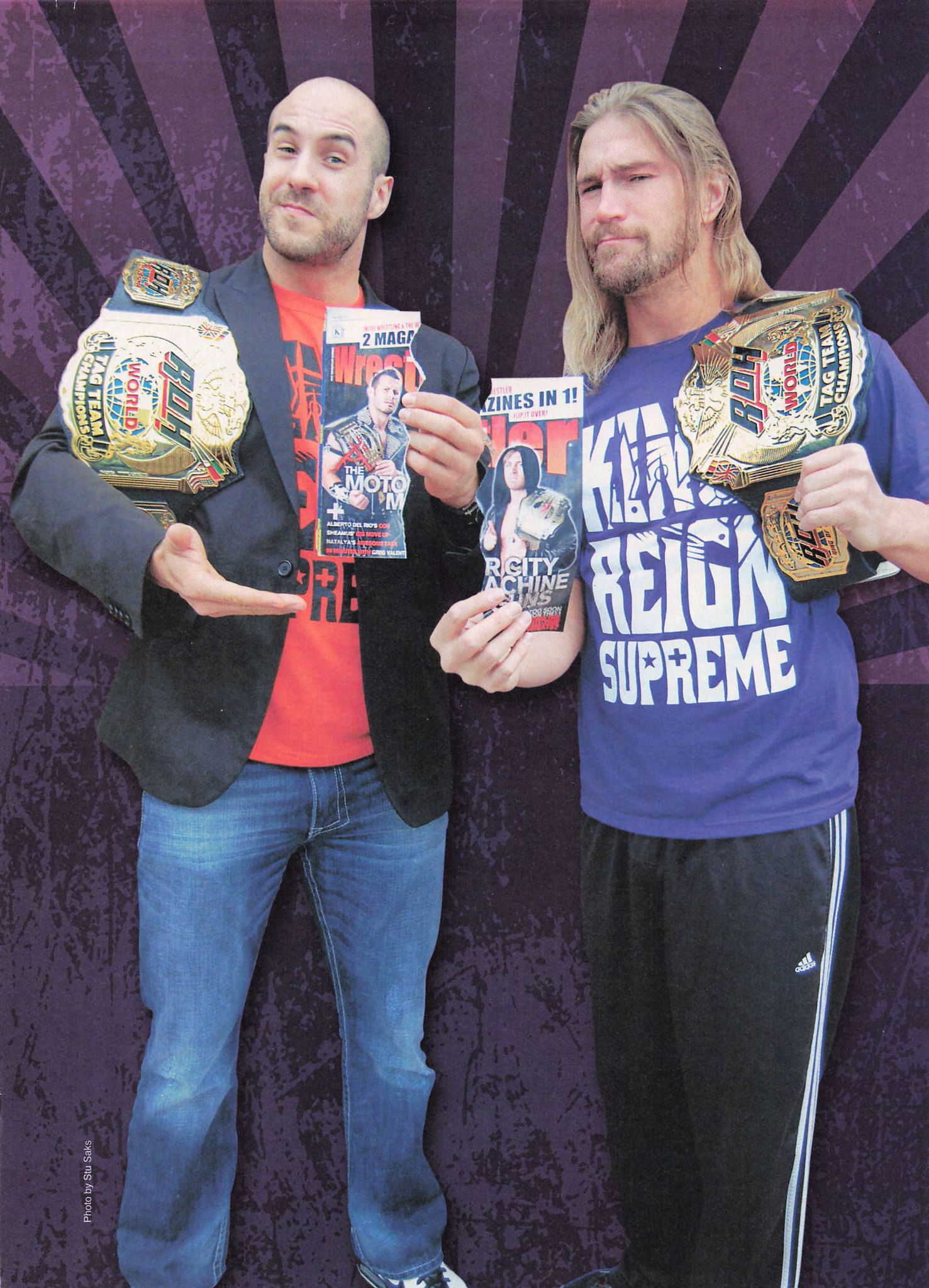

ROH
WORLD
TAG TEAM
CHAMPIONS
2 MAGA
THE MOTO
ZINES IN 1!
FLIP IT OVER!
REIGN
SUPREME
Photo by Stu Saks

Photo by George Napolitano

Tall and willowy, Chris Hero may not cut an imposing figure in the ring, but he delivers every move with confidence. Hero's confidence is so great that he considers his tandem with Castagnoli to be on par or superior to teams such as The Road Warriors and The British Bulldogs.

Motor City Machine Guns are the team to watch. Obviously, the people who say that aren't watching Ring of Honor," an irritated Hero said during a recent telephone interview. "Any talk of all-time greats has to include us."

For certain, in a down period for tag team wrestling overall, The Kings of Wrestling are right up there with The Motor City Machine Guns as one of the sport's elite teams. Their resume alone is evidence of that fact.

As of press time, Hero and Castagnoli were still going strong as the longest-reigning ROH tag team champions in history, having held the belts since April 3, 2010. Along the way, the Kings have retained their championship against some of the very top tag teams in the sport—names like The Briscoe Brothers, The American Wolves, Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin, and, yes, even The Motor City Machine Guns *(see sidebar).*

"What do we have to do around here to get the respect that we deserve?"

Castagnoli's innovative, European-style gives The Kings of Wrestling a dimension few team in Ring of Honor can handle. The only obstacle they are powerless to overcome is their relative obscurity

Photo by George Napolitano

GUNS vs. KINGS: HEAD-TO-HEAD BATTLE SETTLES NOTHING

You would think that the best way to determine which of two tag teams is better is to have them wrestle each other. You would think …

But, alas, the lone battle between The Kings of Wrestling and The Motor City Machine Guns did little to determine which team is superior, and only left fans wanting more.

The match took place at Ring of Honor's Supercard of Honor V, held on May 8 of last year in New York City. The event featured a rare appearance by ROH alumni Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin, who were still two months away from winning their first TNA tag team championship. The Kings of Wrestling had won their second tag team title a month earlier and put the belts on the line in this match.

The bout featured all the excitement that one would expect from such a tag team dream match. Shelley and Sabin punished Hero with their dazzling double-team offense. Castagnoli overpowered his smaller opponents with moves like his signature Ricola Bomb and his airplane spin slam. Hero smashed Shelley with his patented elbow. And the Guns nearly knocked out Hero with synchronized kicks.

Unfortunately, fans would not get a definitive conclusion to the spectacular match. The Guns were disqualified when Jay and Mark Briscoe hit the ring and attacked their longtime rivals, Castagnoli and Hero.

The bout would mark the last appearance, to date, of The Motor City Machine Guns in Ring of Honor. And, while both teams would go on to beat some legendary tandems (The Guns defeating Team 3-D and The Kings defeating Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas), a clear answer to which team is better—or which should be discussed among the all-time greatest—remains elusive.

—Al Castle

Pitched battle with no winner

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Castagnoli asked. "For almost a year now, we have taken out every team that has been put in front of us. And still, those two water pistols get all the attention while we get nothing."

"Nothing" would be a slight exaggeration. Hero and Castagnoli became the first-ever ROH tag team to garner a runner-up spot in the balloting for the *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* Tag Team of the Year for 2010. But, it's true, that they were out-voted by Sabin and Shelley, 46 percent to 9 percent.

And that's just not good enough for Hero and Castagnoli, who believe that not only should they be ranked above the Machine Guns on a list of the sport's current tag teams, but they should be ranked near the very top of a list of *every* team to have ever competed.

"I know some people will call me delusional for saying this, but I honestly feel Claudio and I are every bit as good as The Road Warriors, The Midnight Express, or The British Bulldogs—if not better," Hero deadpanned. "We've got the size, the skill, and the track record to prove it. We've accomplished just as much as any team."

There's no question that, even in a promotion that has prided itself on featuring talented tag teams, The Kings of Wrestling may be the most talented.

The duo, which began teaming in 2005 in Philadelphia's CHIKARA promotion, debuted in ROH in 2006. They quickly made an impact by beating Austin Aries and Roderick Strong to begin their first ROH tag team championship reign, which lasted just over two months.

Hero and Castagnoli had a nasty split late in 2006, but they reunited at Final Battle 2009 and have been nothing short of dominant since then.

Although both Hero and Castagnoli had respectable singles careers in ROH, their union is a testament to the fact that the best tag teams are more than the sum of their parts. Hero's travails through Japan, Europe, and Mexico during a 13-year wrestling career have made him one of ROH's most versatile ring generals. And in Castagnoli, the Kings have a towering Swiss powerhouse with an arsenal that combines his strength, European roots, and some of the most innovative maneuvers the sport has seen.

Photo by George Napolitano

The Motor City Machine Guns are known for their dazzling teamwork, but Hero and Castagnoli are no slouches in that department. The Kings say that if you talk about the Guns as an all-time great team, you must also talk about them in the same vein.

Still, the fact is that, because of ROH's modest fan base compared to WWE or TNA, the vast majority of American wrestling fans may never have heard of The Kings of Wrestling. And some wonder whether ROH's limited reach has not only hampered the Kings' recognition, but also their level of competition.

"Ring of Honor is a great place to work, no question. And they've got some incredibly talented tag teams there," Sabin said. "But the fact is that Chris and Claudio have never had to go up against Beer Money Inc., or Team 3-D. Me and Alex have, and we've beaten both of them."

For a unique perspective on the debate, THE WRESTLER turned to Max and Jeremy Buck of Generation Me, who over the past year have done battle with both The Kings of Wrestling and The Motor City Machine Guns.

"They're very different teams. The Guns are compact, fast—kinda like me and Jeremy," Max said. "The Kings are bigger, and they hit harder. It's tough to say who's better, but I think both are among the best tag teams in a long, long time."

But among the best *ever*? Considering the legendary tandems that have graced the squared circle, from Jack and Jerry Brisco to Matt and Jeff Hardy, inclusion in a list of all-time greats should not be taken lightly.

The one thing that all wrestling's elite tag teams have in common is longevity. With less than two years total competing as a unit, it may be too early to consider Hero's and Castagnoli's collective place in wrestling history. The Kings of Wrestling have already withstood several tests. But the biggest may be the test of time. To them, however, time is beside the point.

"All I'm saying," Hero explained, "is that it's foolish to talk about the Guns as being among the all-time best and not talk about Claudio and me as well because if you really know what we can and have done, and you're not prejudiced by the fact that they compete for one of the so-called 'Big Two,' then you have to know that we're the superior team." □

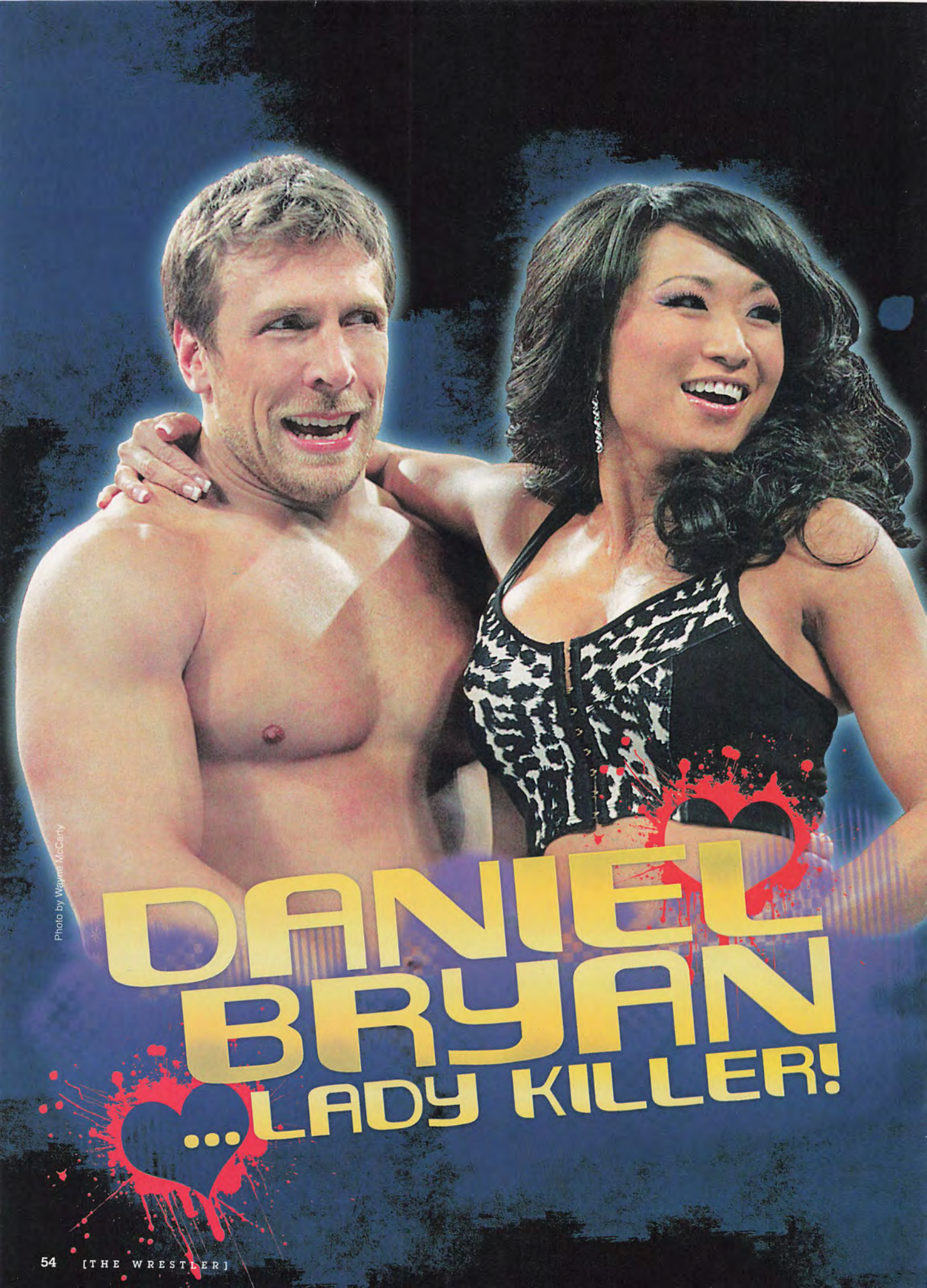


Photo by Wayne McCarty

WILL HE GET SQUASHED IN AN ESTROGEN DEATH MATCH?

Gail Kim has him. The Bellas want him. Daniel Bryan has become wrestling's unlikeliest ladies' man. But if he's not careful, the ladies could ruin him

BY DAN MURPHY

AUSTIN IDOL WAS "The Universal Heartthrob."
Buddy Rose was the "Playboy."
Rick Rude was "Simply Ravishing."

And Daniel Bryan may have them all beat. He has the stunning Gail Kim on his arm and the gorgeous Bella Twins vying for his affection. At this rate, Bryan might be able to dethrone Joel Gertner and become wrestling's newest "Universal Studmuffin."

Maybe not.

Let's face it: Daniel Bryan has no business being wrestling's Casanova du jour. Bryan made it to WWE stardom by virtue of his unparalleled wrestling ability and submission mastery, not for his looks or flashy personality. Bryan's newfound popularity with the ladies is a distraction and, if he's not careful, it could derail his WWE career.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

If it looks like Bryan is enjoying himself with The Bella Twins, it's probably because he is … or was. But these gals could become a distraction for Bryan before too long. Somehow, he has to keep his eye on wrestling.

By his own account, Bryan is a simple man with simple tastes. "Outside the ring, I'm very laid back," Bryan said, in his introductory vignette on *NXT* Season One. "I just really believe in a simple lifestyle, that the best things in life aren't the things that you buy or the things that you own, but the times you spend with your friends and family."

That humble and grounded attitude has helped Bryan keep his priorities in order and helped him become the wrestler he is today. He didn't need dazzling eye candy by his side to make it in wrestling … he did it all on his own.

The day he graduated from high school, Bryan hopped in the car and drove to Texas to train at the Shawn Michaels Wrestling Academy. He trained with a religious fervor. He analyzed videotapes, studied martial arts techniques and MMA submission locks. Over the course of the next decade, Bryan traveled all over the globe, cultivating a reputation as arguably the top technical wrestler in the world. Wrestling was his sole passion, his one true love. His dream was to make it to WWE and to headline WrestleMania.

The critics said it would never happen. Bryan was too bland. He lacked personality. He didn't have "the look."

Bryan never let the critics dash his dreams. He continued to strive for excellence, confident that his wrestling skill would lead him to the Promised Land of WWE. In 2010, it finally happened. By virtue of superior ring work and technical prowess, Bryan received his coveted contract. The U.S. title followed in short order.

And so did the female admirers.

As a ladies' man, Bryan is in unfamiliar territory. He rebuffed Brie and Nikki Bella and revealed that he has been dating Kim, placing him smack-dab in the middle of a Diva catfight. They say that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned; Bryan inadvertently scorned *two* women. The Bellas have been known to interfere in matches.

Photos by George Napolitano

With the Bellas and Gail Kim vying for his attention, Bryan could be tempted to try risky maneuvers, such as this ringside dive on to Heath Slater (left), to impress them. However, it is imperative that Bryan remain faithful to the grappling style that got him to WWE in the first place (right).

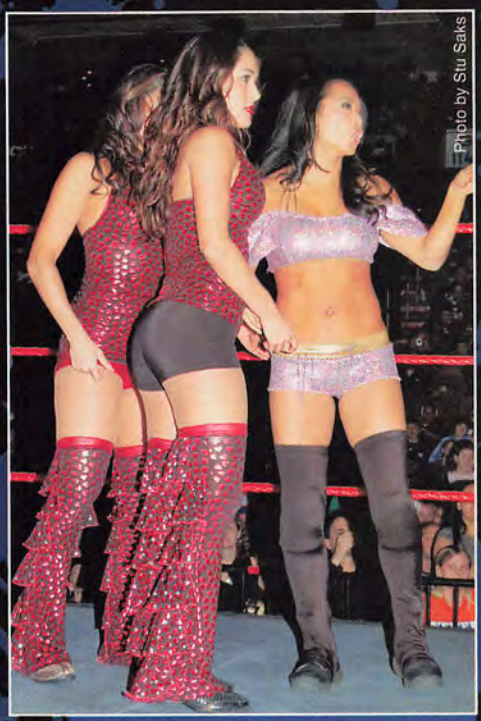


Photo by Stu Saks

It might have been a bad idea for Bryan to tell the Bellas that he'd been seeing Gail Kim the whole time they were cozying up to him on *Raw*. This "ladies' man" will be up the creek for sure should Nikki or Brie decide to seek revenge on him for his affair with Kim.

It's not hard to imagine them causing a distraction or interfering in a match to cause Bryan to lose the U.S. title, just for revenge.

Even if the Bellas don't cause Bryan any more headaches, going public with his relationship with Kim may prove to be a liability. Bryan has shown a weakness. Any potential opponent searching for a psychological edge could target Kim to provoke him. It could even put Kim in physical danger.

Having a girlfriend in his corner may even affect Bryan's style of wrestling. He may be tempted to try high-risk moves at inopportune times in hopes of impressing her. He may find himself glancing at her out of the corner of his eye, just to make sure she is safe at ringside, which could create an opening for his opponent to strike. A backstage spat could ruin his pre-match preparation, or be carried over into the ring.

Bryan is not used to that type of extracurricular distraction. The key to his success has always been his focus; once that focus begins to waver, Bryan is in jeopardy.

"I don't blame Bryan for spending some time with some of the WWE Divas, but he should definitely be careful," said *Raw* color commentator Jerry Lawler. "Women in wrestling can be a highly combustible element. Just look at how Maryse got inside Ted DiBiase's head. Look where that got him.

"I've seen plenty of guys who start bringing their girlfriend or wife to ringside for moral support. Heck, I've done it myself. More often than not, it ends up causing more problems than it's worth. It only invites more distractions and more drama. Who needs that?"

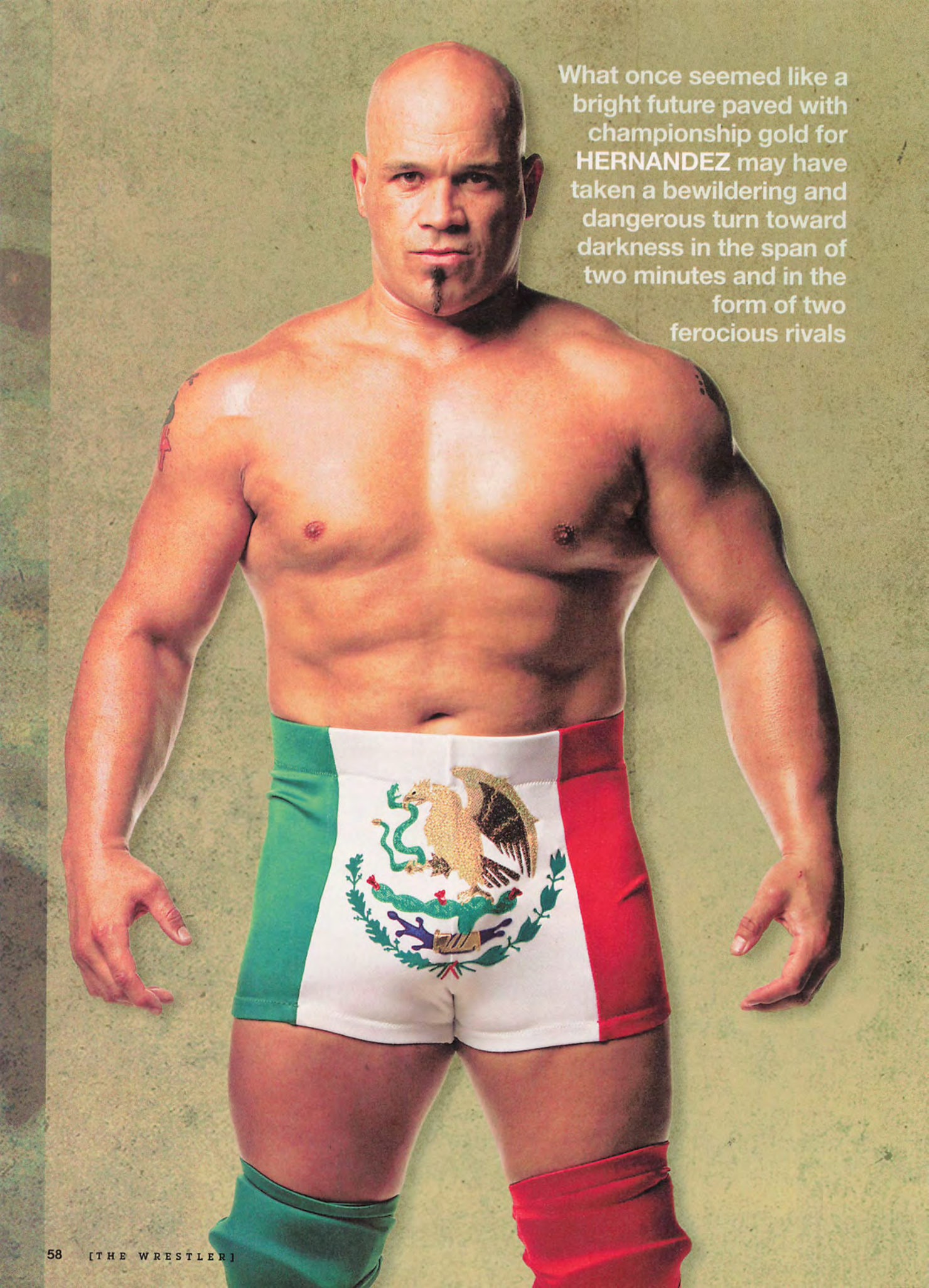
Certainly not Bryan. It took him a decade to make it to WWE. A slump at this stage of his career could be devastating. Bryan should be concentrating on defending his championship and contending for the WWE title. Getting mixed up with all these feuding femme fatales could needlessly sidetrack him.

"The kid has all the time in the world to date beautiful women," Lawler said. "This is his golden opportunity to achieve his life's ambition. It's no time for him to get caught up in that drama."

Michael Cole enjoys calling Bryan a "nerd." He ridicules Bryan for not watching television, for reading, and for being introverted. If Daniel is indeed a nerd, being one has helped him steer clear of diversions. Being one has helped him become a champion. And being one also is the way for Bryan to continue to succeed in WWE. It's time for Bryan to embrace his

"Or for me," laughed "The King." □

Photos by George Napolitano



What once seemed like a bright future paved with championship gold for **HERNANDEZ** may have taken a bewildering and dangerous turn toward darkness in the span of two minutes and in the form of two ferocious rivals

HERNANDEZ' BOLD MISCALCULATION

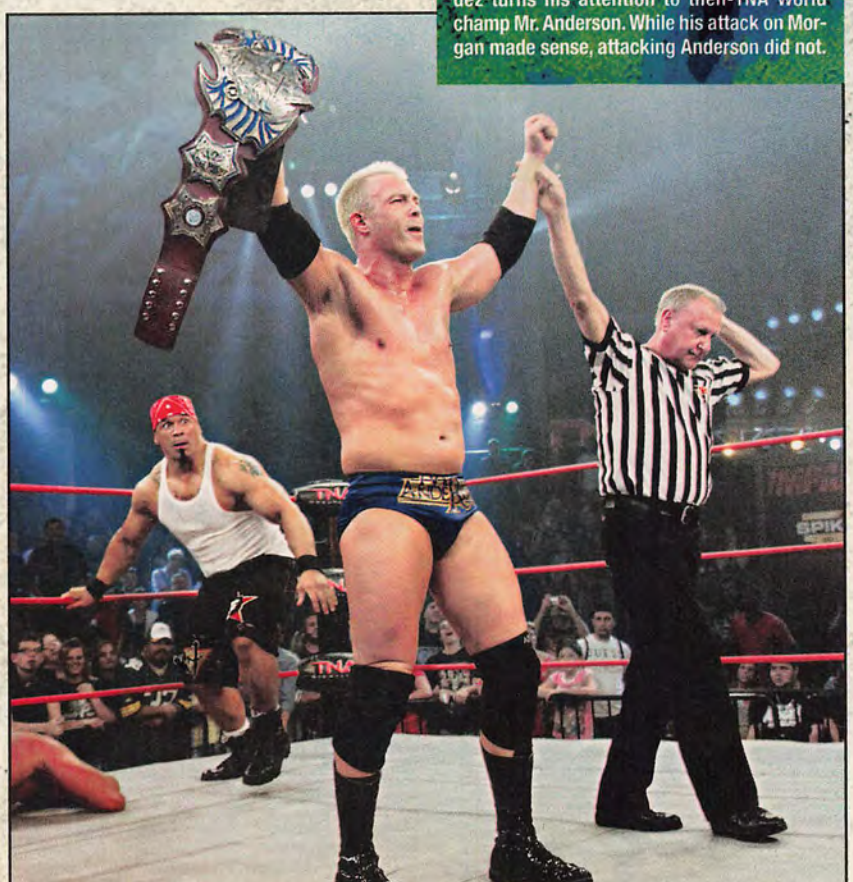
HE MADE TWO DANGEROUS ENEMIES IN TWO MINUTES

BY FRANK INGIOSI // PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNAWRESTLING

THERE ARE TIMES in a man's life when he can sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labor. At some point, he finally realizes and acknowledges that all the time and effort he put in to his career was worth every second of sacrifice. He also realizes that one misstep could cost him everything.

Always one of the hardest-working competitors in TNA, Hernandez was never one to turn down a fight, regardless of the odds. Whether he was defending the TNA World tag team title with Homicide as one-half of LAX or, more simply, crushing skulls as a budding singles competitor, Hernandez never seemed like the kind of wrestler that would commit a mistake that could potentially derail his career.

Sure, Hernandez liked to throw his 280 muscular pounds around inside and outside of the ring, but nobody could



After disposing of rival Matt Morgan, Hernandez turns his attention to then-TNA World champ Mr. Anderson. While his attack on Morgan made sense, attacking Anderson did not.

As TNA World tag team champs, Morgan and Hernandez never seemed comfortable in the ring. Perhaps that was because out of the ring, they didn't get along. Morgan was so tired of Hernandez' "selfishness" that he eventually put his partner out with a neck injury.

ever accuse him of being careless.

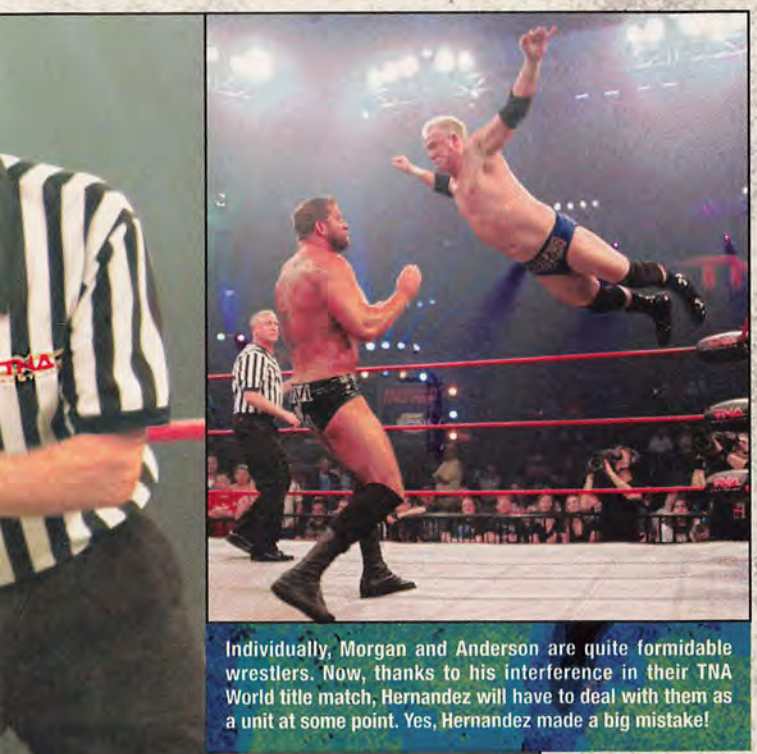
It's precisely that reputation that makes his early-February attack on both Matt Morgan and Mr. Anderson so puzzling.

"I had no idea what the hell 'Super Mex' was doing when he went after Morgan *and* Anderson," said TNA color commentator Taz, who called the World title match on *Impact* with Mike Tenay. "Honestly, I still don't know."

Few people in the Impact Zone that

Hernandez got revenge on Morgan several times over in various matches, but those victories obviously weren't enough to satisfy him.

night knew what exactly Hernandez sought to accomplish when he blindsided both Morgan *and* then-champion Anderson. One thing was obvious, though. Within the span of just a few minutes, Hernandez went from being one of the most promising main-event contenders to a potential victim. By starting battles on two fronts, Hernandez had unwittingly united Morgan and Anderson, who, despite being rivals, now share a common enemy.



Individually, Morgan and Anderson are quite formidable wrestlers. Now, thanks to his interference in their TNA World title match, Hernandez will have to deal with them as a unit at some point. Yes, Hernandez made a big mistake!

On one hand, Hernandez' strike on Morgan made perfect sense. In fact, it was widely expected throughout the wrestling world that once Hernandez had the opportunity to exact some level of revenge on his former tag partner, he would. After all, Morgan did sideline Hernandez for several months with a neck injury after a horrific and unexpected beating following their tag title defense against Beer Money Inc. at Destination X 2010 the previous night.

Morgan's words after the attack only added insult to injury. "Hernandez didn't realize what I did for him by allowing him to be my partner. All he did was try to bring my career down into the toilet with his," explained Morgan. "You don't know what it was like. I tried to make us a success, but to him it was all 'Super Mex' this and 'Hernandez' that."

Eventually, their feud came to a head at Victory Road 2010, where Hernandez appeared to have satiated his thirst for revenge by defeating Morgan in the confines of a steel cage.

Fast forward to February 2011, when Hernandez retuned to TNA following extensive rehab and a stint in Mexico's AAA promotion. With Morgan in the fans' good graces, and the need for revenge on Morgan coursing as strongly as ever, Hernandez aligned himself with TNA's Immortal faction. That decision alone was enough to elicit questions from wrestling fans and pundits. Factor in his curious actions on *Impact* a week later, and it seems as though Hernandez had traded in all his years of hard work for the instant gratification of getting still more revenge on Morgan.

Still, his impetus for attacking Anderson remains unclear, and Hernandez isn't talking. Tenay, however, *is* talking, and he has multiple theories on Hernandez' actions.

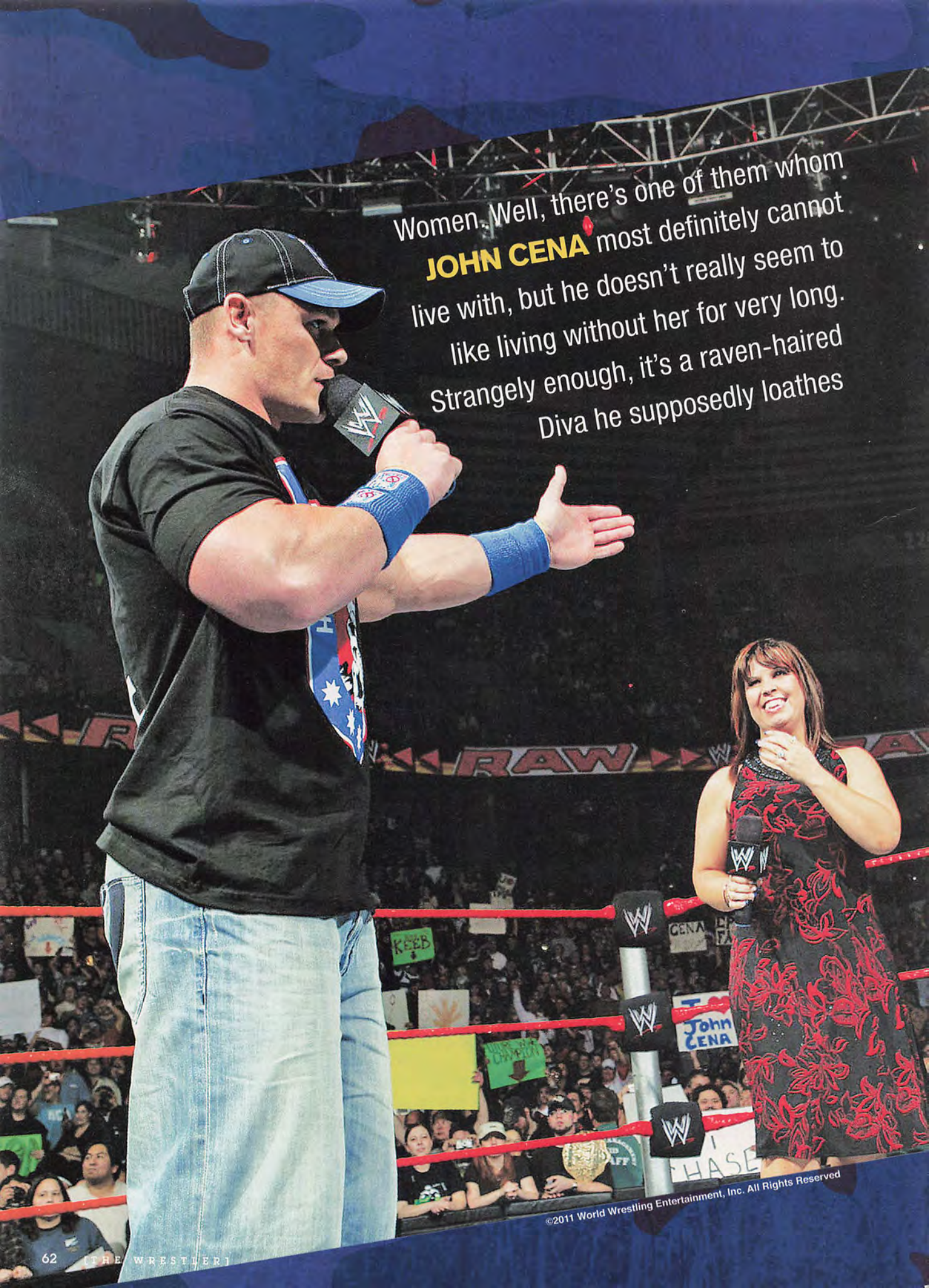
"There are several ways to look at this," he said. "One, Hernandez could have been trying to ingratiate himself to Immortal by softening up Anderson for their boy Jeff Hardy. Anderson was champ at the time and Hardy was unable to get the belt off him after several matches, until he did it at Against All Odds. Another theory is that Hernandez wanted to ignite a feud with Anderson and leapfrog to the number-one contender's spot by forcing TNA to sign a title match between them. Or, it could be that Hernandez simply got caught up in the moment and went too far."

In any case, Tenay agrees that Hernandez made a serious blunder. Anderson no longer has the title. But he does have a new—albeit tenuous—ally in Morgan. They now share the common goal of taking out Hernandez, or at least paying him back for his indiscretion. Also, Immortal, which recently lost the services of Ric Flair's Fortune stable when that group defected, is comprised of notoriously egotistical members whose own personal glory is sure to supercede Hernandez' wants or needs. They have no interest in advancing his cause, so he's unlikely to find the support or backing he might have thought he'd get from them. With Fortune gone, Hulk Hogan gimpy following surgery, and Abyss out with injury, how strong is Immortal?

Now Hernandez, who has since aligned himself with Knockouts Sarita and Rosita as well for some reason, counts himself among the hunted, with two of TNA's most powerful, savvy, and dangerous predators on his scent.

Perhaps his new association with Immortal emboldened Hernandez to act with impunity. Rubbing shoulders with a legend like Hogan and a powerbroker such as Eric Bischoff can have that effect on a wrestler seeking to re-enter the TNA ranks with a splash. But to the more level-headed, the path Hernandez was on prior to his injury—slowly, methodically, and yes, painstakingly, charting his course to the top—seems much more prudent.

Yes, Hernandez acted boldly when he took out Morgan and Anderson, but in reality, he made a huge mistake. □



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CENA'S VICKIE OBSESSION

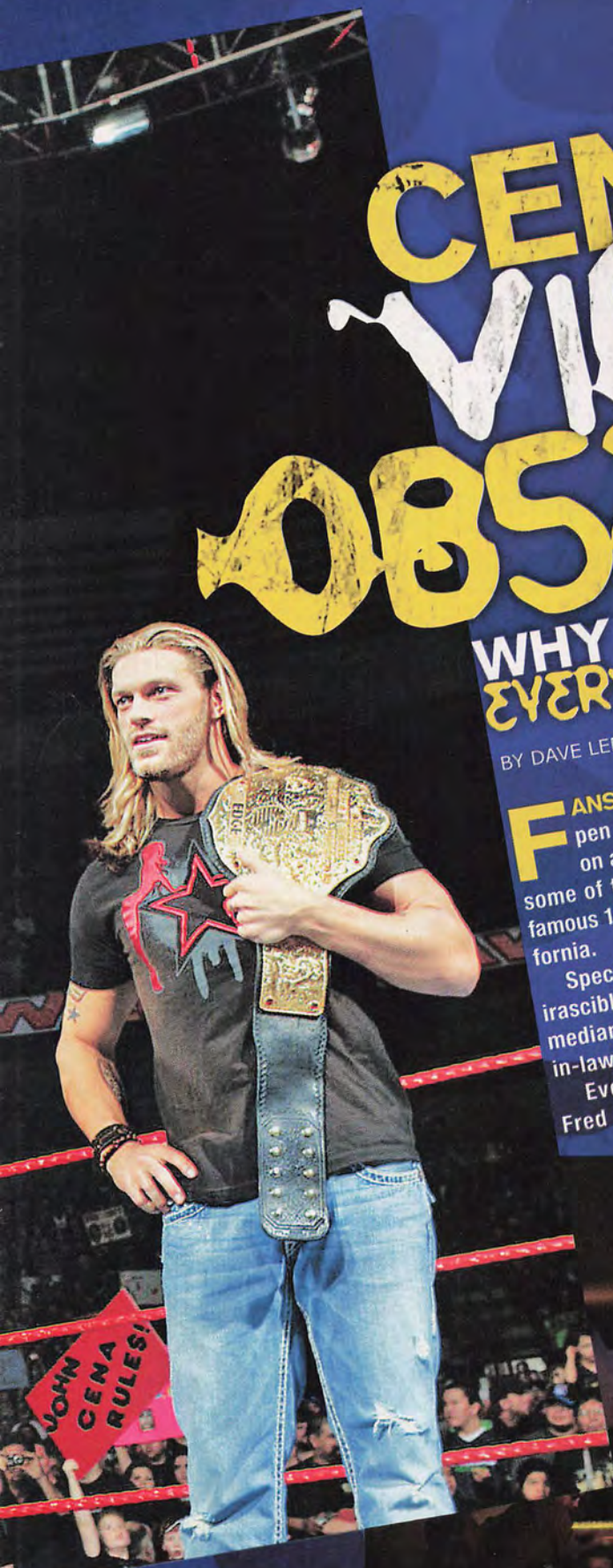
WHY HE HAS TO BE EVERYWHERE SHE IS!

BY DAVE LENKER

FANS OF CLASSIC sitcoms, or those who just happen to have channel-surfed their way to TV Land on a random weeknight are almost certain to enjoy some of the acerbic verbal exchanges inside the most famous 1970s fictional junkyard in downtown Watts, California.

Specifically, those would be the barbs traded by the irascible Fred G. Sanford (played by famed stand-up comedian Redd Foxx) and his preachy, ultra-pious sister-in-law, Esther (played by LaWanda Page).

Every time Esther comes through his front door, Fred cringes and shakes his head in disgust at what



Despite his reputation for being a good guy, it seems Cena can't help himself whenever Vickie Guerrero is around. He has to make his presence felt with mean-spirited jokes at her expense to the delight of WWE fans from coast to coast.

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Photo by George Napolitano

No matter what Vickie says on the mike, it seems fans are always ready to shout her down with boos and catcalls. Has Cena figured out that standing directly across from her in the ring is a good place for WWE babyfaces to be?

he considers her horrific face. He doesn't much care for her personality, either, as evidenced by the obligatory insult or two he hurls in her direction.

"Watch it, sucka!" she usually responds before or after calling him an "ol' heathen," a "fish-eyed fool," or some other unflattering name. Welcome to the hilarious TV show known as *Sanford And Son*, which ran in prime time on NBC for six seasons starting nearly four full decades ago.

For those who have never seen the program, it's interesting to note that ol' Fred may have claimed to hate "Aunt" Esther all along, but he sure seemed to make sure she was around him a lot. It was like an uncomfortable attraction. He invited her for dinner on important occasions, helped her out of some tough spots from time to time, and even asked that she look after his "empire" of junk when he jetted off on vacation to Hawaii.

Maybe life in the junkyard was just a little dull for a senior citizen, and a little verbal warfare livened things up. Maybe it was just a simple, uncomplicated TV show not worthy of such in-depth investigations.

In any case, 40 years later, taking a little creative license, such scenes are being played out in WWE rings pretty often. Is it just us, or have you noticed that whenever Vickie Guerrero shows up on *Raw* with boyfriend Dolph Ziggler in tow, John Cena is usually not too far behind? And then come the cheap shots, though his insults are typically a little more hip than old Fred's. Replace "heathen" and "fish-eyed fool" with lots of high-pitched "Excuse me's!" and you have Vickie doing a pretty good Aunt Esther for all to witness. And while some *Sanford And Son* aficionados may have appreciated Aunt Esther's zingers and taken her side at times, it's hard to find a supporter of Vickie in any WWE crowd anywhere.

No offense to Eddie's widow, but who could blame Cena if he needs a break from all the stress of being WWE's top star/ambassador? As he detailed one night this winter on *Raw*, the past year hasn't been too kind to him.

Brutally attacked by Nexus ... forced to be Wade Barrett's manservant ... briefly forced out of WWE by Barrett ... targeted and brutalized again by The New Nexus, led by Punk ... made to look like a fool by The Rock. Quite glamorous, huh?

Some people like to hit a punching bag to work out frustration, others prefer a nice massage to help them relax, still others think a stiff drink cures all. Cena would just as soon antagonize a rival, and Vickie is as good a target when he needs to blow off steam.

To each his own.

Yet with Dolph Ziggler on the Smackdown roster and Cena having far more pressing issues with Punk, The Nexus, The Miz, and even The Rock mostly on the Raw side (not to mention Edge dealing with Vickie on the Smackdown side), well, what's the point, right? Does he also feel the need to start a feud with Ziggler just because Ziggler has established himself in the main-event mix on Smackdown?

Not necessarily, though maybe there's more at work here.

Vickie might be pleased—but most likely won't be, knowing her and her miserable disposition most of the time—to discover that she could actually be serving several viable purposes in the world according to Cena. We won't rehash in detail the odd reaction that Cena

Photo by George Napolitano

Maybe Cena isn't targeting Vickie after all. Dolph Ziggler, Guerrero's current flame, has climbed to the top of the Smackdown brand. Perhaps Cena, by insulting Vickie, is looking to incite a feud with Ziggler on Raw they can carry over to Smackdown.

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Photo by George Napolitano

Even though she's no stranger to being humiliated in the ring, Vickie, who has lost her pants to Beth Phoenix (above) and been covered in pig slop (right), remains an easy target for Cena because she allows herself to get flustered and angered by his sophomoric put-downs. Whether she knows it or not, Vickie's playing right into her rival's hands.

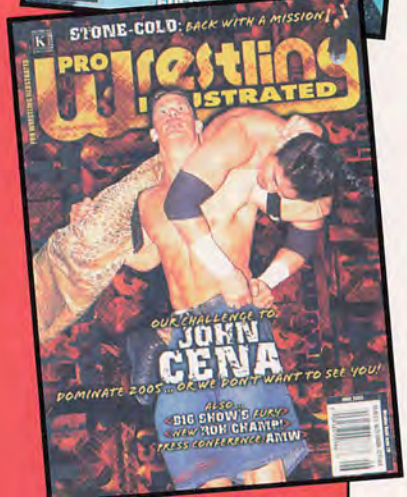
tends to elicit from WWE fans from week to week. Suffice to say once again that after all these years, it's still difficult to figure out why some fans hate him so, and just as difficult to predict exactly how mixed the crowd reaction to him will be depending on the city in which WWE has set up camp on any given night.

In these instances, you can deposit all your raw data and detailed demographic analyses on that issue in the nearest receptacle, thank you very much, because when he's sharing a ring or stage with Vickie, suddenly, the people from Charleston to China are 100 percent united in their support for him. Of course, given the nuclear heat that Vickie has been emitting for a few years now, it might be interesting to see what the crowd reaction would be if Osama bin Laden stepped out onto the Raw stage to interrupt one of her grating, fingernails-on-blackboard promos.

Goofing on Vickie is an easy and enjoyable way for Cena to paint himself as the all-conquering hero, as he certainly has taken note of how long the boos and catcalls rain down once Guerrero gets a microphone in her hand, and how loud and enthusiastic the cheers get for anyone who stands in her way and ticks her off. Heck, he took note of that a few years ago when he somehow got stuck in the middle of a bizarre lust triangle involving Vickie, Edge (who was then on her side), and The Big Show.

If she really doesn't want him to be virtually everywhere she is, maybe the best advice is something her mother probably gave her when she was little: Just ignore the person who's antagonizing you. Sooner or later, that person will give up.

But, then, what fun would that be for anyone? □



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September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

April 1999: The Crock! The Title Change That Screwed The World! Centerfold: Chris Jericho. Plus: Bill Goldberg, Tommy Dreamer, Booker T, more Unofficial/Officials.

May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: The PWI Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll.

April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.

July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share ... Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.

September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.

December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH HOLIDAY 2000

January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.

March 2001: Hulk Hogan: WWF Fans Want Him Back! Plus: Mike Awesome, Rikishi, Jerry Lynn, Elix Skipper, Triple-H.

May 2001: The WrestleMania Curse! Will The Great One Ever Win The Big One? Plus: Vince McMahon, William Regal, Page & Nash, Ivory, Lance Storm, ECW.

June 2001 (116 Pages): The PWI Poll. Plus: Ric Flair, Chyna, Steve Austin.

July 2001: Women's Work! It Ain't What It Used To Be! Plus: Dudleys, Chavo Guerrero Jr., Justin Credible, Francine, Scott Steiner.

September 2001: WWF-WCW: The 10 Questions That Must Be Answered. Plus: Triple-H, Stacy Keibler, Paul Heyman, Matt Hardy.

October 2001 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Perry Saturn, Dallas Page, Terri.

March 2002: No More Joking, No More Choking: Y2J Takes A Serious Stab At Superstardom! Plus: Test, The Rock, Eric Bischoff, Bradshaw, Foley vs. Regal.

May 2002: The Mania To End All Manias! What Will Wrestling Look Like By WrestleMania X-9? Plus: Trish Stratus, RVD, Russ Haas, Big Bossman, WWF comedy.

July 2002: Steph Infection! How Can Triple-H Keep His Mind On His Game? Plus: Goldust-Terri, NWO, Ron Waterman, Spike & Tazz, Jazz.

August 2002 (116 Pages): Supercards 2002: WrestleManiaX8, WWA Revolution, Super 8. Plus: X-Pac, Steve Corino, Ric Flair.

September 2002: No Rock ... No Problem: The WWF Can Thrive Without The Great One. Plus: WWF draft, Billy Kidman, Sean O'Haire, Stanley Weston.

October 2002 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Lou Thesz, Francine, Edge.

January 2003: Brock Aftershock: How Lesnar Changed The Future Of WWE. Plus: Chris Benoit, Low-Ki, Jericho-Flair, Rey Misterio Jr., SummerSlam at 15.

February 2003 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of Raw, Smackdown, independents, international, the business, the art.

March 2003: Rocky Horror! He Won't Forget What You Did Last Summer. Plus: Matt Hardy, Eddie Guerrero, Bass-WWE, Victoria, WWE's next wave.

June 2003 (116 Pages): The PWI Poll. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr.

August 2003 (116 Pages): Goldberg: He Has WWE Caught Between The Rock And A Hard Place! Plus: WrestleMania XIX, Shawn Michaels graduates, Paul London, Raven.

October 2004: Eugene, The Impossible Dream: When Will His Opponents Wake Up? Plus: Victoria, Edge, Dudleys, A.J. Styles, six-sided ring.

February 2005: A Yes Man? No Way! Ric Flair's Secret Plan Will Ruin Triple-H! Plus: Y2J, The Naturals, Luther Reigns, WrestleMania 21 countdown.

June 2005: Our Challenge To John Cena: Dominate 2005 ... Or We Don't Want To See You! Plus: Steve Austin, Austin Aries, Big Show, AMW.

August 2005: Kurt Angle: The 10 Reasons He's The Best Ever. Plus: Edge, Alex Shelley, Christy Hemme, DDP WWE Hall of Fame.

October 2005: Whole Lita Love: How Many Men Can One Woman Ruin? Plus: John Cena, C.M. Punk, McMahon-Bischoff-Paul E., A.J. Styles.

November 2005: PWI 500. Plus: Muhammed Hassan, Batista, RVD, Samoa Joe, Chris Jericho, PWI Tag Team Wish List.

February 2006: Losing Street Cred? The Time Is Now For Cena To Get Tough. Plus: Jerry Lawler, Eddie Guerrero, Austin-Hogan.

August 2006: Exclusive! Edge Comes Out Swinging! Plus: Brother Runt, Benoit & Lashley, Milano Collection AT.

December 2006: The Angry Young Man! C.M. Punk Leads The New ECW Revolution. Also: Triple-H, Christian, Batista.

February 2007: Hollywood Ending: Cena's Pumped For A Year Of Wrestling Only! Also: Randy Orton, Hardcore Holly, Booker-Batista, Kurt Angle.

Summer 2007: The Match Vince Let Get Away ... And The Title He Wouldn't! Also: Hogan-Big Show, Team 3D, WrestleMania 23 weekend, ECW.

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THE WRESTLING ANALYST

Photo by George Napolitano

EDGE

Years Pro: 19

Size: 6'4", 240

"*PWI* 500" Listings:
2010—18
2009—4
2008—5
2007—2
2006—3
2005—8
2004—59
2003—34
2002—7
2001—20
2000—51
1999—83
1998—67
1997—254

Titles:
WWE World heavyweight
WWE heavyweight championship
WWE World tag team
WWE tag team
WWE Intercontinental
WWE United States
SSW tag team
NTPW pro tag team
ICW Street Fight tag team

***PWI* Awards:**
Match of the Year (2000, 2001)
Feud of the Year (2005, 2006)
Most Hated Wrestler of the Year (2006)
Most Improved Wrestler of the Year (2001)
Comeback of the Year (2004)

THE NUMBERS

OFFENSE (9.0): Throughout the course of his nearly 20-year career, Edge has morphed from a more aerial wrestler willing to take risks with his body to a guy who is cold, calculating, and looking to keep things on the ground. His spear finisher is devastating and suits him well in its stunning simplicity.

DEFENSE (9.0): As much a throwback to an earlier era as anyone in the industry today, Edge's defense is built primarily around slowing down the match to a pace that suits him and, when necessary, skirting the rules. He's constantly looking to turn an opponent's misstep into a massive, power counter that could alter a match instantaneously.

EXPERIENCE (9.5): Coming up on his 19th, year in the sport, Edge has wrestled every top star of this generation, both in main-event singles matches as well as in the tag team division. There doesn't seem to be a hold or maneuver for which he has not developed a counter.

CONDITIONING (9.0): It may be argued that due to the severity and frequency of injuries that he's endured throughout his career, Edge has issues with conditioning, but that would be unfair. Upon each return, Edge is stronger and faster than he was prior. He always stays in excellent shape.

STAMINA (9.0): Edge will be as fresh at the end of a 30-minute match as he was entering the ring. Part of his meticulous level of conditioning is ensuring that he will be able to physically outlast the competition in any match. He has grown to become excellent at regulating his energy and pacing himself.

SCIENCE (8.5): If Edge were a scientist, he'd be a psychologist because the only level of "science" in his approach to the ring involves messing with an opponent's head. He doesn't approach competition from the perspective of a wrestling tactician, but, rather, more of a man who will do the legwork outside of the ring to put his opponent in the most vulnerable position possible, psychologically.

POWER (9.0): This is a cornerstone of Edge's ring approach. He enjoys utilizing his strength as a set-up for higher-risk maneuvers. Although he doesn't have the appearance of a classic heavyweight, Edge competes with a chip on his shoulder and a truckload of horsepower to back it up.

SPEED (8.5): Where Edge has excelled in increasing his striking and strength moves, he has begun to lag in speed. Be it the years of competition catching up to him or, perhaps, a conscious effort to sacrifice some speed in order to focus on power, Edge has moved more toward a power game during his most recent title runs.

ABILITY TO ABSORB PUNISHMENT (9.0): Early in his career, Edge could take a great deal of punishment if only by turning off his pain receptors until after the match. Today, he absorbs punishment only where necessary to set up offense. He's not above stepping out of the ring to slow down an opponent's momentum.

QUALITY OF OPPOSITION (10.0): Edge is a staple of the main-event scene in the most prestigious wrestling promotion in the world. He has fought and, often, bested the top talent in the game today. A bona fide star of the industry, his roster of opponents reads like a list of current, and future, hall of fame members.

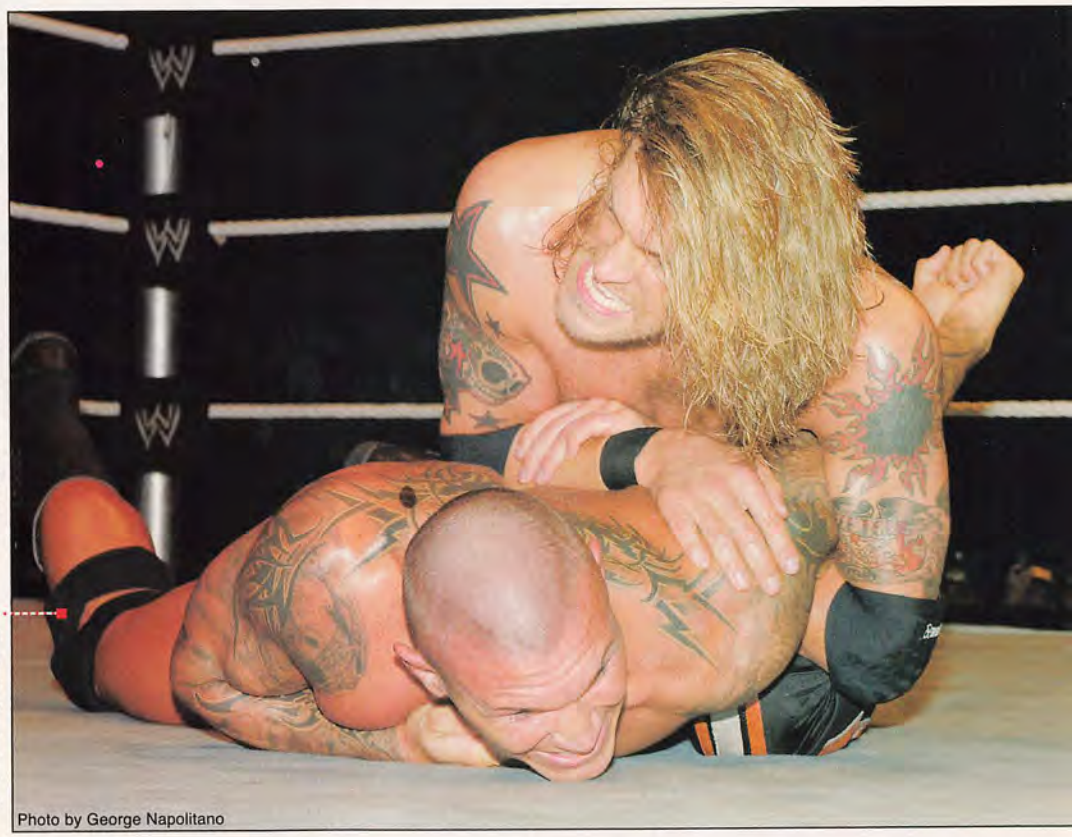
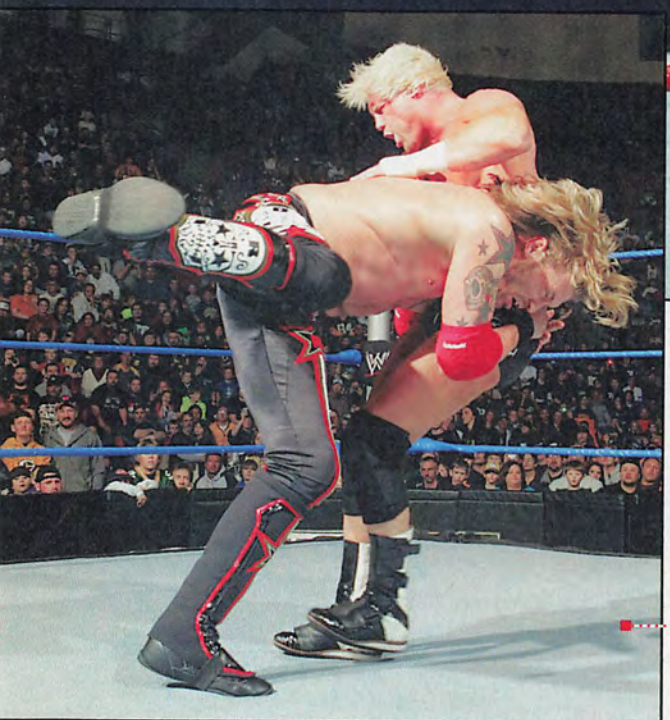


Photo by George Napolitano

① **Over the years, Edge has developed a ground game that younger wrestlers like Randy Orton have trouble countering. The wisdom of years combined with superb conditioning has allowed Edge to excel into his 40s.**

Photo by George Napolitano

② Edge doesn't have the girth of a man like Kane, but his leveraged attack allows him to match power with just about any man in the sport.



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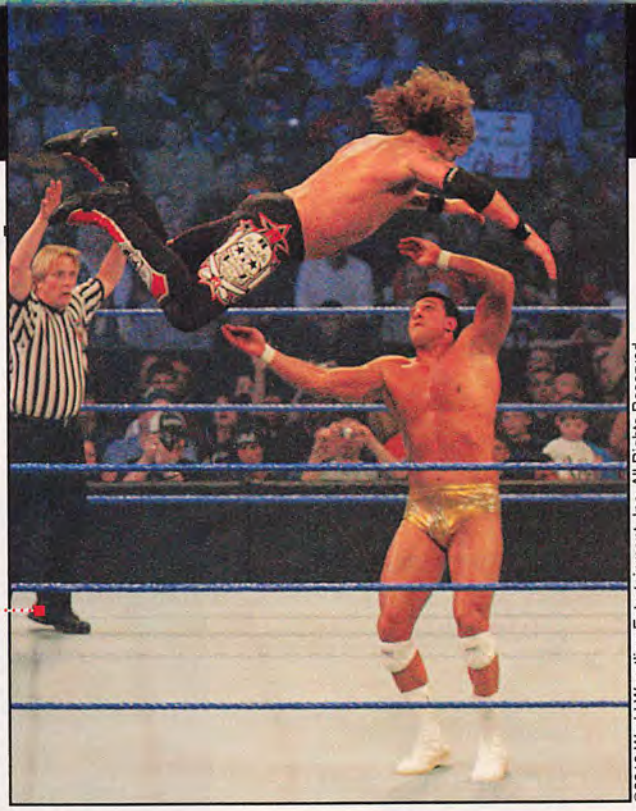
③ Edge's game plan centers around weakening an opponent and setting him up for his most effective finisher, the spear.

THE ANALYSIS

REPERTOIRE: Edge's entire repertoire is woven together to set up an opponent for his spear finisher. He'll work the body with side suplexes and backbreakers, all in an effort to soften the opponent's mid-section and leave it susceptible to attack. Occasionally, he will return to his roots and utilize the top rope for either a high-flying attack maneuver or a spine-shattering superplex. He will incessantly attack with any means available.

STRENGTHS: Physically, Edge knows what works for him and doesn't try to step outside of his limitations. He's a combination power/aerial wrestler with a concerted focus on defeating the opponent with strength and guile. From a persona standpoint, Edge is the wild card of WWE. He can be the most vile rulebreaker one day and become a beloved fan favorite the next. He constantly keeps the wrestling world on its collective toes.

④ **Just because Edge isn't as reliant on his aerial attack as he was earlier in his career doesn't mean he won't use it from time to time, usually catching opponents like Alberto Del Rio completely off-guard.**



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WEAKNESSES: The most effective way of defeating Edge is for an opponent to, essentially, mirror his method of attack. Waiting for Edge to make a mistake and then filling that void with a vicious power strike is the most successful method of neutralization. Prior to a match, opponents would be wise to play into Edge's classically short temper. Derail the man's patience and he will be off his game before the bell rings.

DEFINING CAREER MOMENT: January 8, 2006—Fresh from a disqualification loss to Ric Flair for the Intercontinental title earlier in the night, Edge shocked the world by cashing in his "Money In The Bank" guaranteed world title shot following the main event—an Elimination Chamber match—at New Year's Revolution 2006. By defeating a physically exhausted John Cena, Edge captured his first WWE heavyweight championship.

FUTURE: Edge will be a fixture atop WWE for as long as he chooses to continue his career. He has a rabid fan following, the looks of a star, and a hall of fame resume. Having accomplished virtually everything a man could hope to do in WWE, it would only be fitting that Edge set his sights on the seemingly unattainable record of 16 world championship reigns currently held by Ric Flair. As of this writing, he needs six more to tie that mark. □

⑤ **Edge's eyes widen as he sees the weakened condition of John Cena at New Year's Revolution in 2006. Immediately after Cena's grueling Elimination Chamber match was the ideal time for Edge to cash in his "Money In The Bank" title shot, and it netted him his first singles world title.**

Photo by George Napolitano

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

1 **THE MIZ**
231, Cleveland, OH
(2) WWE heavyweight champion

2 **STING**
255, Venice Beach, CA
(–) TNA World champion

3 **EDGE**
250, Toronto, ON
(3) WWE World champion

4 **HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
230, Ogaki, Japan
(–) IWGP heavyweight champion

5 **ALBERTO DEL RIO**
240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
(–) No. 1 contender WWE World title

6 **JOHN CENA**
240, West Newbury, MA
(–) No. 1 contender WWE title

7 **ADAM PEARCE**
248, San Diego, CA
(4) NWA heavyweight champion

8 **RODERICK STRONG**
215, Tampa, FL
(6) Ring of Honor heavyweight champion

9 **EL ZORRO**
200, Sevilla, Spain
(–) AAA champion

10 **RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(–) No. 2 contender WWE title

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

STING

TAG TEAMS

1 **ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM**
Combined weight: 470 pounds
(4) TNA World tag team champions

2 **CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(2) ROH tag team champions

3 **CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN**
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(–) No. 1 contenders ROH tag team title

4 **CHRIS SABIN & ALEX SHELLEY**
Combined weight: 420 pounds
(1) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

5 **HEATH SLATER & JUSTIN GABRIEL**
Combined weight: 457 pounds
(–) WWE tag team champions

6 **MASATO YOSHINO & PAC**
Combined weight: 331 pounds
(–) DGUSA Open the United Gate champions

7 **JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS**
Combined weight: 449 pounds
(5) NWA tag team champions

8 **DAMIEN SANDOW & TITUS O'NEILL**
Combined weight: 504 pounds
(9) FCW tag team champions

9 **KENNY OMEGA & KOTA IBUSHI**
Combined weight: 390 pounds
(–) IWGP junior heavyweight tag team champions

10 **MAX & JEREMY BUCK**
Combined weight: 350 pounds
(8) No. 2 contenders TNA World tag team title

RAW

WWE Champion:
THE MIZ
(C) 231, Cleveland, Ohio

1—JOHN CENA
(4) 240, West Newberry, MA

2—RANDY ORTON
(2) 245, St. Louis, MO

3—CM PUNK
(–) 222, Chicago, IL

4—DANIEL BRYAN
(3) 190, Aberdeen, WA

5—MARK HENRY
(–) 420, Silsbee, TX

6—JOHN MORRISON
(1) 223, Los Angeles, CA

7—SHEAMUS
(6) 280, Dublin, Ireland

8—TED DiBIASE JR.
(7) 235, West Palm Beach, FL

9—SANTINO MARELLA
(–) 226, Calabria, Italy

10—R-TRUTH
(–) 235, Charlotte, NC

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
EDGE
(C) 250, Toronto, ON

1—ALBERTO DEL RIO
(2) 240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico

2—DOLPH ZIGGLER
(4) 221, Hollywood, CA

3—REY MYSTERIO JR.
(3) 175, San Diego, CA

4—WADE BARRETT
(–) 265, Manchester, England

5—KANE
(1) 323, Hell

6—THE BIG SHOW
(6) 485, Tampa, FL

7—KOFI KINGSTON
(5) 221, Ghana, West Africa

8—DREW McINTYRE
(–) 252, Ayr, Scotland

9—CODY RHODES
(10) 223, Marietta, GA

10—JACK SWAGGER
(–) 263, Perry, OK

TNA

World Champion:
STING
(–) 255, Venice Beach, CA

1-JEFF HARDY
(C) 225, Cameron, NC

2—MR. ANDERSON
(2) 243, Green Bay, WI

3—MATT MORGAN
(1) 310, Fairfield, CT

4—HERNANDEZ
(–) 280, Houston, TX

5—ROB VAN DAM
(4) 237, Los Angeles, CA

6—KURT ANGLE
(3) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

7—JEFF JARRETT
(7) 235, Nashville, TN

8—KAZARIAN
(–) 225, Anaheim, CA

9—DOUGLAS WILLIAMS
(5) 225, Reading, England

10—D'ANGELO DINERO
(10) 230, Harlem, NY

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
RODERICK STRONG
(C) 215, Tampa, FL

1—DAVEY RICHARDS
(1) 205, Othello, WA

2—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(2) 224, Los Angeles, CA

3—JAY BRISCOE
(8) 215, Laurel, DE

4—HOMICIDE
(3) 205, Brooklyn, NY

5—EDDIE EDWARDS
(4) 214, Boston, MA

6—MARK BRISCO
(–) 215, Laurel, DE

7—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(7) 265, Lucerne, Switzerland

8—DELIRIOUS
(–) 189, Edge of Sanity

9—CHRIS HERO
(9) 225, Metropolis

10—EL GENERICO
(5) 180, Tijuana, Mexico

Top **10** and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (—) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED FEBRUARY 28, 2011

ALPHA-1 WRESTLING: Champion—Justin Sane; 1—Brodie Lee; 2—Josh Alexander; 3—Ethan Page; 4—Cheech; 5—Michael Elgin; 6—Ashley Sixx; 7—Joey Kings; 8—Colin Delaney II; 9—Colt Cabana; 10—Matt Cross.

American Premier Wrestling: Champion—Jeremy Young; 1— Scotty Bullwinkle; 2—Curt Raines; 3—CUJO; 4—Lamar Phillips; 5—David Powers; 6—Chris Lightning; 7—TITAN; 8—High Roller Haize; 9—Jay Clinton; 10—Slim Sexy.

DRAGON GATE USA: Champion—YAMATO; 1—Masato Yoshino; 2—Austin Aries; 3—Akira Tozawa; 4—BxB Hulk; 5—Naruki Doi; 6—Brodie Lee; 7—Jon Moxley; 8—CIMA; 9—Ricochet; 10—PAC.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—MEGA; 1—Chris Wylde; 2—Glen Osbourne; 3—Aden Chambers; 4—Scott Wright; 5—Travis Blake; 6—Bazooka Joe; 7—Kid America; 8—Jason Leigh; 9—Courageous Cruz; 10—Papadon.

ELITE PRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Vincent Vega; 1—Flex Phenom; 2—Bodie Williams; 3—Jason Riggs; 4—Aidiean; 5—Griffen; 6—Leslie Leatherman; 7—OGB; 8—Chris Cline; 9—Sinister Cross; 10—Draconis Diablo.

EVOLVE: Champion—Vacant; 1—Jimmy Jacobs; 2—Johnny Gargano; 3—Chuck Taylor; 4—Drake Younger; 5—Ricochet; 6—Munenori Sawa; 7—Sami Callihan; 8—Chris Lee; 9—Claudio Castagnoli; 10—Homicide.

I BELIEVE IN WRESTLING: Champion—Ray Beez; 1—Q.T. Marshall; 2—Jerrelle Clark; 3—Nooie Lee; 4—Alex Pourteau; 5—Lince Dorado; 6—Sean Davis; 7—Ricky Young; 8—Santana; 9—Gus Money; 10—J.D. Amazing.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Col. Spud Wade; 1—Ken Steel; 2—Scott Lee; 3—Jeff Holland; 4—Damien James; 5—Sgt. Jim Nelson; 6—Eclipso; 7—Ace Englund; 8—Devon Mack; 9—Jamie Wright; 10—The Dark Dragon.

PLATINUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Shane Marx; 1—Geter; 2—Mason; 3—Vordell Walker; 4—Jay Fury; 5—The Vandal; 6—Chip Day; 7—Pandora; 8—Sugar Dunkerton; 9—The Phantom; 10—Davey Richards.

TENNESSEE XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Bob O Mac; 1—Nick Taylor; 2—Bobby Blassie; 3—Allen Shepard; 4—Funkmaster V; 5—Bobby Rayne; 6—Shane Daniels; 7—Tsunami Kid; 8—J-Mac; 9—Demetria; 10—Maskerade.

TEXAS WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Big Dogg; 1—Draven; 2—Total P.I.M.P; 3—Tha Gangsta; 4—Lemus II; 5—Vince Vile; 6—Ken Johnson; 7—Galan Ramirez; 8—Madness; 9—Kevin Knight; 10—Desperado.

WOMEN SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; 1—Serena; 2—Alicia; 3—Brittney Savage; 4—Sassy Stephanie; 5—Jessicka Havok; 6—Rain; 7—Jazz; 8—Nikki Roxx; 9—Kristen Astara; 10—Traci Brooks.

NWA

Champion:
ADAM PEARCE
(C) 248, San Diego, CA

1—THE SHEIK
(1) 265, Tehran, Iran

2—PHILL SHATTER
(2) 247, Paris Island, SC

3—COLT CABANA
(3) 233, Chicago, IL

4—SID SYLUM
(4) 218, Las Vegas, NV

5—AUSTIN ARIES
(–) 202, Milwaukee, WI

6—ANTONIO THOMAS
(6) 235, Panama City, FL

7—OLIVER JOHN
(7) 228, Sacramento, CA

8—JOEY RYAN
(8) 210, Los Angeles, CA

9—CHANCE PROPHET
(9) 225, Sacramento, CA

10—BLUE DEMON JR.
(10) 194, Mexico City, Mexico

JAPAN

1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(–) 230, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—SUWAMA
(1) 260, Kanagawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion

3—TAKASHI SUGIURA
(2) 220, Nagoya, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

4—SATOSHI KOJIMA
(3) 250, Tokyo, Japan

5—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(–) 190, Saitama, Japan

6—GO SHIOZAKI
(8) 240, Kumamoto, Japan

7—TOGI MAKABE
(10) 240, Sagamihara, Japan

8—SUZUKI KOTARO
(–) 180, Warabi, Japan

9—GIANT BERNARD
(–) 350, Boston, MA

10—YOSHIHIRO TJIRI
(–) 180, Kumamoto, Japan

MEXICO

1— EL ZORRO
(1) 200, Sevilla, Spain
AAA champion

2—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(2) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
CMLL champion

3—JUSHIN LIGER
(6) 210, Hiroshima, Japan

4—NEGRO CASAS
(–) 170, Mexico City, Mexico

5—ATLANTIS
(–) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

6—VOLADOR JR.
(–) 190, Monclova, Mexico

7—LA SOMBRA
(7) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

8—AVERNO
(–) 170, Mexico City, Mexico

9—CHESSMAN
(–) 230, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico

10—LA PARKA
(10) 220, Hermosillo, Mexico

WOMEN

1—EVE TORRES
(–) 131, Los Angeles, CA
WWE Divas champion

2—MADISON RAYNE
(2) 115, Seattle, WA
TNA Knockouts champion

3—MERCEDES MARTINEZ
(5) 147, Waterbury, CT

4—MICKIE JAMES
(4) 128, Richmond, VA

5—MICHELLE McCOOL
(–) 135, Palatka, FL

6—BRITTANY FORCE
(6) 130, Johnstown, PA

7—MADISON EAGLES
(6) 160, Sydney, Australia

8—JESSICKA HAVOK
(–) 175, Canton, OH

9—TASHA SIMONE
(8) 156, The Darker Side of Evil

10—MELISSA ANDERSON
(–) 142, San Francisco, CA

REMEMBER HIM?

The bushy hair and ubiquitous apple weren't part of his act back in 2001, but Carly "Carlito" Colon had the same mischievous glint in his eye that angered his rivals when he debuted in WWE in 2004. Even without the apple, though, it's a safe bet that Carlito knew exactly how to tweak opponents and fans when he wrestled in Ohio Valley Wrestling, which served as WWE's developmental affiliate at the time. Currently, Carlito is battling in Puerto Rico's World Wrestling Council.

Photo by Scott Romer

check out this shot!

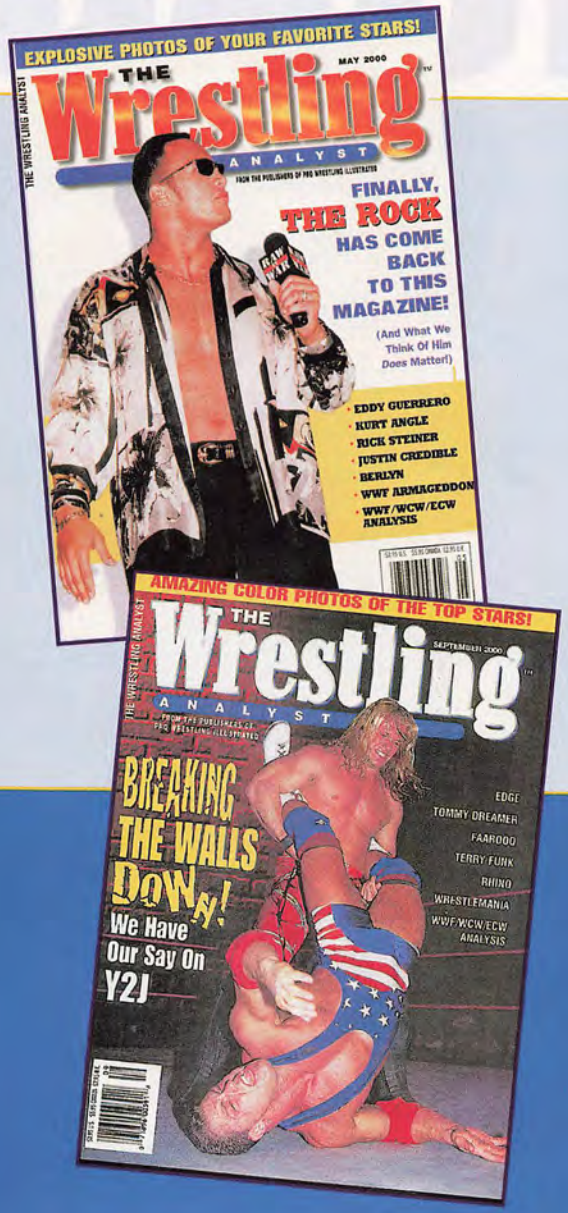
It might appear as though TNA Knockouts champion Madison Rayne would be doomed by this top-rope Lou Thesz press from Mickie James. But with Tara on hand to interfere on Rayne's behalf, not to mention a set of brass knuckles, Rayne had little to worry about. Thanks to her cheating, Rayne walked away from this Last Knockout Standing title match at Against All Odds with her title intact.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE Wrestling ANALYST

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *The Wrestling Analyst* are still available in limited quantities. Printed on high-gloss paper and jammed with color photos, *The Wrestling Analyst* received acclaim for its insightful evaluations of top stars, PPV events, and the major wrestling federations. Order now before our limited supply is exhausted!



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- ☐ **Sept. 1998:** Steve Austin, Booker T., Kane, Bam Bam Bigelow, Scott Norton, Perry Saturn, Tom Brandi, WrestleMania XIV.
- ☐ **Nov. 1998:** Bill Goldberg, Eddie Guerrero, Mark Mero, Headbangers, Brian Christopher, Lance Storm, D-Lo Brown, Bash at the Beach.
- ☐ **Jan. 1999:** Owen Hart , Bret Hart, Jeff Jarrett, Disco Inferno, Taka Michinoku, Chris Candido, Fit Finlay, SummerSlam.
- ☐ **March 1999:** New Age Outlaws, Mark Henry, The Giant, D.O.A., 2 Cold Scorpio, Tracy Smothers, Halloween Havoc.
- ☐ **May 1999:** Scott Hall, X-Pac, Lex Luger, Chris Jericho, Val Venis, Al Snow, Rob Van Dam, Starrcade.
- ☐ **July 1999:** Vince McMahon, Dudleys, Billy Kidman, Goldust, Konnan, Dan Severn, Valentine's Day Massacre, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **Sept. 1999:** Sable, Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Juventud Guerrera, Jerry Lynn, Bossman, Norman Smiley, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **Nov. 1999:** Sting, Godfather, Super Crazy, Darren Drozdov, Horace Hogan, Great American Bash, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **Jan. 2000:** Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, Bruno Sammartino, Bob Backlund, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Pedro Morales, Randy Savage.
- ☐ **March 2000:** Chyna, Sid Vicious, Steve Blackman, Yoshihiro Tajiri, Barry Windham, Unforgiven, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **May 2000:** The Rock, Eddie Guerrero, Kurt Angle, Rick Steiner, Justin Credible, Berlyn, Armageddon, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **July 2000:** Rikishi, Test, Madusa, Mike Awesome, Meng, Albert, Royal Rumble, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **Sept. 2000:** Chris Jericho, Edge, Tommy Dreamer, Terry Funk, Rhino, WrestleMania, WWF-WCW-ECW.

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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended February 28, 2011

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JOE DOERING & KONO
(February 6, 2011; from Taiyo Kea & Akebono, Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MINORU
(January 2, 2011; from Kaz Hayashi; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: SUWAMA
(August 29, 2010; from Ryota Hama; Tokyo, Japan)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(December 4, 2010; vacated when Andrew Ryker announced his retirement; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: CHRIS WYLDE
(December 4, 2010; won a battle royal for the vacant title, last eliminating Mozart Fontaine; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT SAIGON & DAMIEN DRAGON
(January 30, 2011; beat T.J. Cannon & Bruce Maxwell; Vorhees, NJ)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: LUCKY CANNON
(February 3, 2011; from Bo Rotundo; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAMIEN SANDOW & TITUS O'NEILL
(December 3, 2010; beat Xavier Woods & Mason Ryan for the vacant title; Plant City, FL)

FCW FLORIDA DIVAS CHAMPION: AJ LEE
(December 16, 2010; from Naomi Night; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JON MOXLEY
(April 17, 2010, beat Roderick Strong for the vacant title; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS
(July 31, 2010; from Chris Gray & Tommy Taylor; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: JAKE MANNING
(July 31, 2010; from Brad Allen; Crystal River, FL)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(January 4, 2011; from Satoshi Kojima; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON
(June 19, 2010; from Wataru Inoue & Yuji Nagata; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PRINCE DEVITT
(June 19, 2010; from Naomichi Marufuji; Osaka, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ADAM PEARCE
(March 14, 2010; from Blue Demon Jr.; Charlotte, NC)

NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CRAIG CLASSIC
(November 6, 2010; from Mike Quackenbush; Fort Pierce, FL)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KORY CHAVIS & JON DAVIS
(November 20, 2010; from Rasche Brown & Keith Walker; Milwaukee, WI)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TASHA SIMONE
(November 6, 2010; beat Rachel for the vacant title; Lebanon, TX)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CLIFF COMPTON
(January 8, 2011; from Lowrider; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RYAN NEMETH & PAREDYCE
(February 5, 2011; from Christopher Silvio & Raphael Constantine; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: MUHAMMAD ALI VAEZ
(January 26, 2011; from Alex Silva; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: LADY JOJO
(August 28, 2010; from Holly Blossom; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(October 9, 2010; beaty Brandon Gatson, Chris Hero, and Joey Ryan in a four-way for the vacant title; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EL GENERICO & PAUL LONDON
(May 9, 2010; from Matt & Nick Jackson; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: TAKASHI SUGIURA
(December 6, 2009; from Go Shiozaki; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOTARO SUZUKI
(December 5, 2010; from Yoshinobu Kanemaru; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAKUMA SANO & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(September 18, 2010; beat Akitoshi Saito & Bison Smith for the vacant title; Osaka, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: RODERICK STRONG
(September 11, 2010; from Tyler Black; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(April 3, 2010; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Charlotte, NC)

RING OF HONOR TV CHAMPION: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(December 10, 2010; from Eddie Edwards; Louisville, KY)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MADISON EAGLES
(April 11, 2010; from MsChif; Berwyn, IL)

TNA TV CHAMPION: ABYSS
(January 9, 2011; from Douglas Williams; Orlando, FL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: MADISON RAYNE
(October 11, 2010; from Tara; Orlando, FL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ANGELINA LOVE & WINTER
(December 9, 2010; beat Madison Rayne & Tara in the finals of a tournament for the vacant title; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: STING
(February 24, 2011; from Jeff Hardy, Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM
(January 23, 2011; from Chris Sabin & Alex Shelley; Orlando, FL)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: KAZARIAN
(January 9, 2011; from Jay Lethal; Orlando, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: DOLPH ZIGGLER
(July 28, 2010; from Kofi Kingston; Laredo, TX)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: EDGE
(December 19, 2010; beat Kane in a Fatal 4-way that included Rey Mysterio Jr. and Alberto Del Rio; Houston, TX)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: HEATH SLATER & JUSTIN GABRIEL
(February 20, 2011; from Santino Marella & Vladimir Kozlov; Oakland, CA)

WWE CHAMPION: THE MIZ
(November 22, 2010; from Randy Orton; Orlando, FL)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: DANIEL BRYAN
(September 19, 2010; from The Miz; Rosemont, IL)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: EVE
(January 30, 2011; beat Layla in a Fatal 4-way that included Michelle McCool and Natalya; Boston, MA)

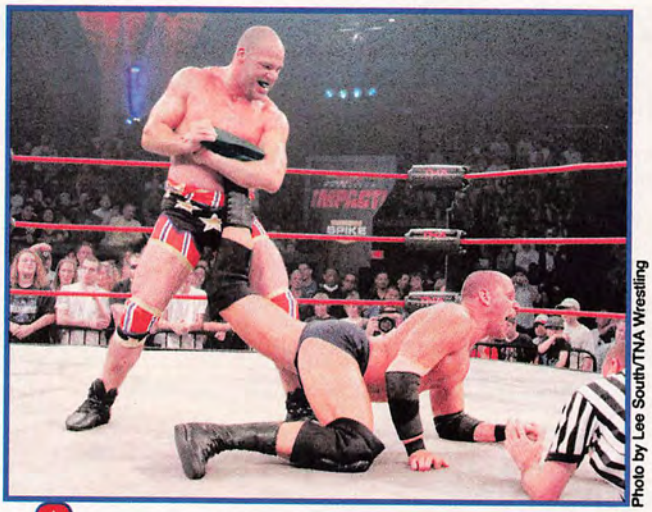


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

DECEMBER 20, 2009:

Turns back Desmond Wolfe in a violent Three Degrees of Pain match, dropping a pinfalls-only match but rallying to win submission and escape the cage bouts

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

OCTOBER 10, 2010:

Falls in three-way final of tournament to crown new TNA champion, as Jeff Hardy pins Mr. Anderson with help from Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff; the Immortal stable rises to prominence in the aftermath

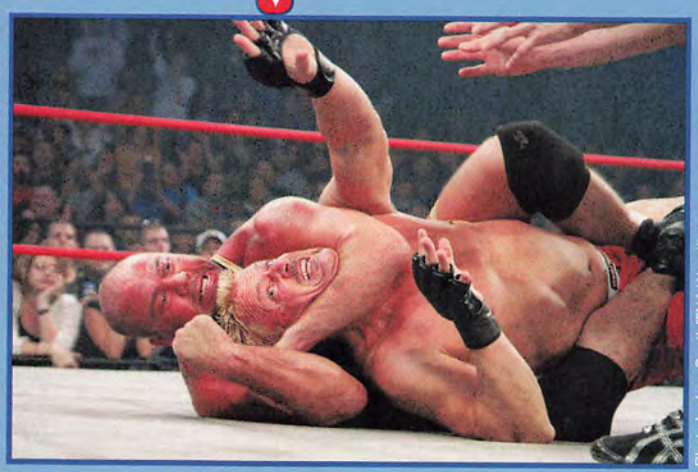
JANUARY 4, 2010:

Loses to TNA champion AJ Styles in the main event of the live, three-hour Monday night debut of *Impact*

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

JANUARY 9, 2011:

Fights to a no-contest with Jeff Jarrett in "Martial Arts Exhibition," but is attacked and bloodied by Jarrett afterward; days later, on *Impact*, ex-wife Karen returns to TNA in alliance with Jarrett



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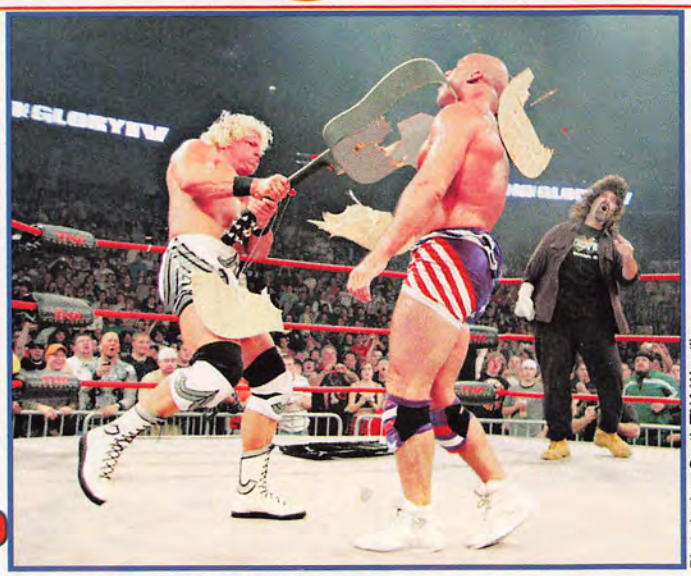


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

SEPTEMBER 14, 2008:
Fails to take TNA title from Samoa Joe after being hit with a guitar by Jeff Jarrett, touching off a long-lasting feud

MAY 24, 2009:
Temporarily loses leadership of Main Event Mafia to Sting

AUGUST 15, 2009:
Arrested in much-publicized incident after then-girlfriend Rhaka Khan's accusations of harassment; this, along with further charges of driving with a suspended license and illegal drug possession were later dropped

OCTOBER 23, 2008:
Forms the Main Event Mafia with Sting, Booker T, Kevin Nash, and, later, Scott Steiner

JUNE 21, 2009:
Claims third TNA title by winning a King of the Mountain match with help from Samoa Joe (who subsequently joined the MEM)

SEPTEMBER 20, 2009:
Loses title to AJ Styles in a five-way match at No Surrender, which also included Sting, Matt Morgan, and Hernandez

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

FEBRUARY 18, 2007:
Debuts in New Japan Pro Wrestling, teaming with Yuji Nagata to defeat Travis Tomko and Giant Bernard

JUNE 17, 2007:
Wins a five-man King of the Mountain match to capture the TNA World title

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

AUGUST 12, 2007:
Becomes first man to hold every title in TNA simultaneously after capturing X division and tag team titles by defeating Samoa Joe in a "Winner Takes All" match

MAY 13, 2007:
Defeats Christian Cage and Sting in a three-way match to win first NWA World title

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

JUNE 29, 2007:
Wins IWGP heavyweight title by defeating Brock Lesnar in Japan

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

OCTOBER 25, 2007:
Defeats Sting to become a two-time TNA champion

wrestling timeline

SEPTEMBER 18, 2005:
Defeats WWE champion John Cena via disqualification at Unforgiven

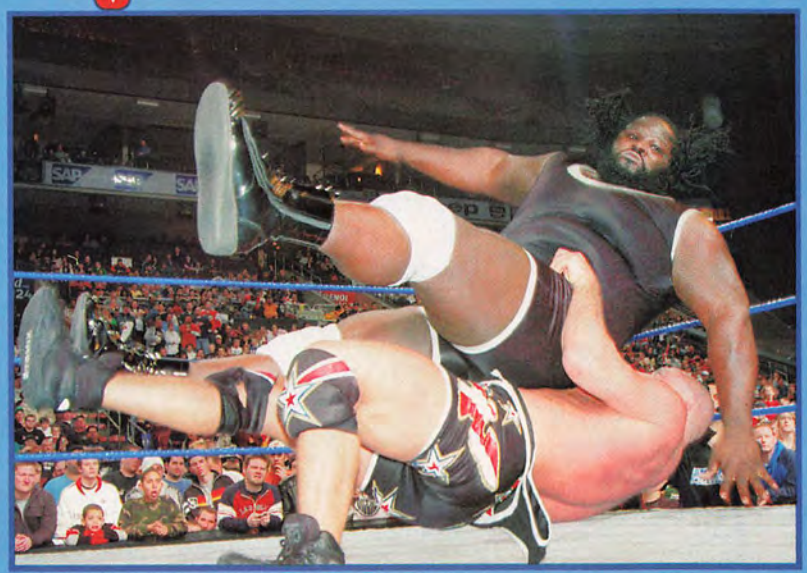
MAY 29, 2006:
Drafted to the newly created ECW brand

SEPTEMBER 24, 2006:
Signing with TNA is announced by TNA President Dixie Carter at the conclusion of the No Surrender pay-per-view

JANUARY 13, 2006:
Wins 20-man battle royal, last eliminating Mark Henry, to win the vacant World title

AUGUST 25, 2006:
Released by WWE due to "personal issues" and what was thought to be the company's concern over his health and mental well-being

NOVEMBER 19, 2006:
Forces Samoa Joe to submit to the anklelock at Genesis, thus ending Joe's long undefeated streak in TNA



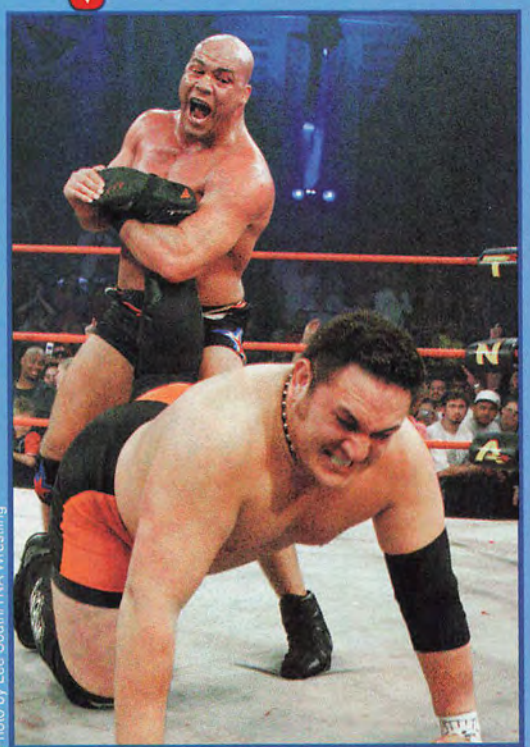


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

APRIL 11, 2003:
Undergoes alternative neck surgery, during which Dr. Hae-Dong Jho removes only the spurs and selected portion of afflicted disks

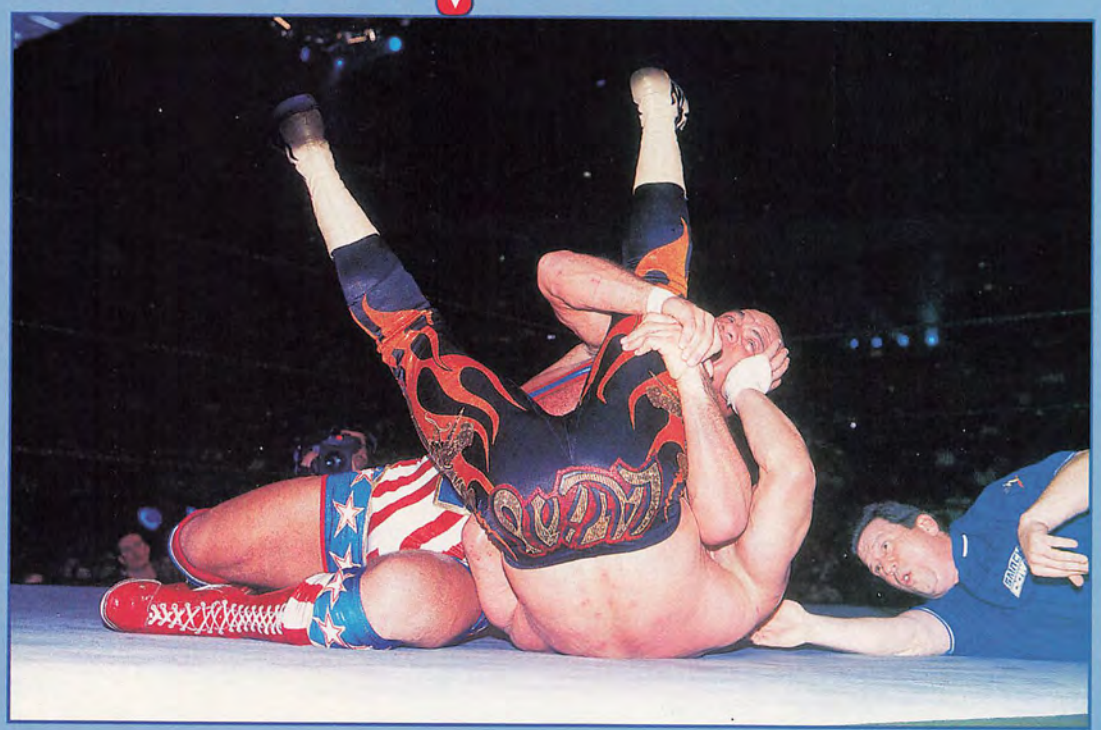
MARCH 23, 2004:
Is named general manager of Smackdown while rehabbing neck injuries re-aggravated after being chokeslammed off of a ledge by The Big Show

APRIL 3, 2005:
Forces Shawn Michaels to tap out to the anklelock in a runaway *PWI* Match of the Year award winner at WrestleMania 21

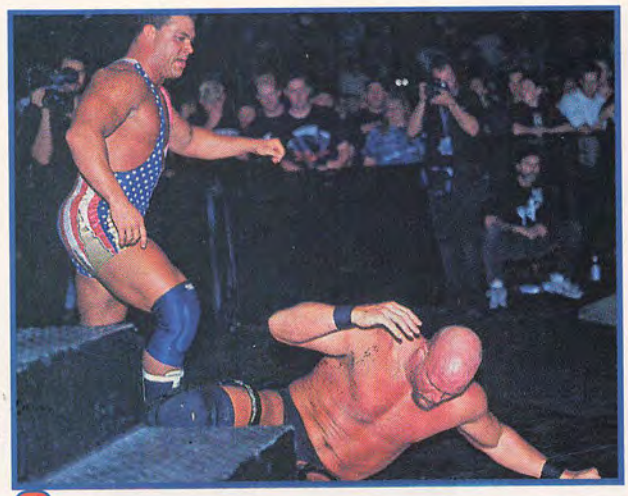
JULY 27, 2003:
Regains WWE title in triple-threat match against Brock Lesnar and The Big Show at Vengeance

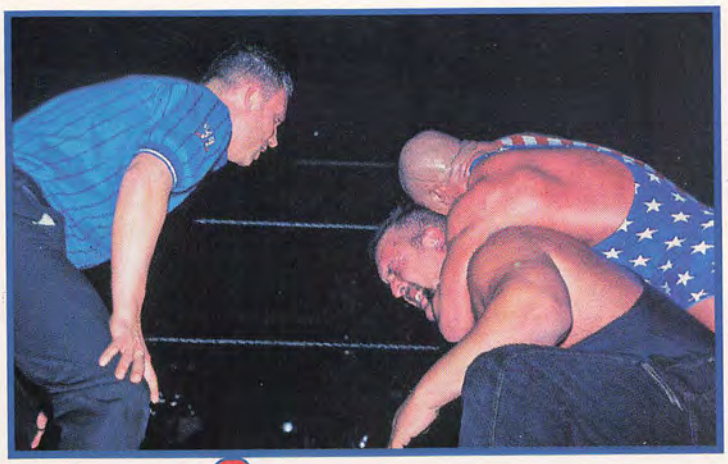
MARCH 14, 2004:
Falls short in WWE title match against champion Eddie Guerrero at WrestleMania XX.

JUNE 25, 2005:
Loses rematch to Michaels at Vengeance, shortly after jumping from Smackdown to Raw in the 2005 Draft Lottery



wrestling timeline





SEPTEMBER 23, 2001:
Becomes a two-time WWF champion, defeating "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin at Unforgiven

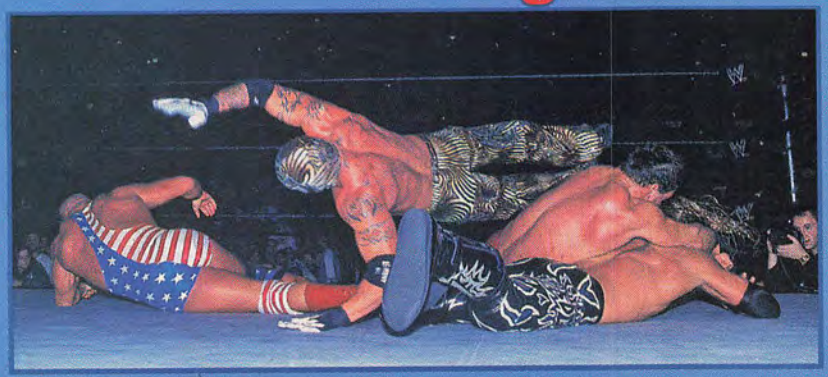
MAY 19, 2002:
Is shaved bald by Edge after losing hair-vs.-hair match at Judgment Day

DECEMBER 15, 2002:
Wins Undisputed WWE title from The Big Show at Armageddon

OCTOBER 22, 2001:
Adds another title to his trophy case by defeating Rhino for the WCW U.S. title on *Raw*

OCTOBER 20, 2002:
Teams with Chris Benoit to defeat Edge and Rey Mysterio Jr. in tournament final to become WWE tag team champions

MARCH 30, 2003:
Loses WWE title to Brock Lesnar in the main event of WrestleMania XIX



Kurt Angle

INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport

FEBRUARY 10, 2000:
Wins first WWF championship—the European title—by defeating Val Venis on *Smackdown*

APRIL 2, 2000:
Drops both of his titles in a two-falls triple-threat match with Chris Benoit and Chris Jericho at WrestleMania 2000

JULY 24, 2001:
In front of hometown fans in Pittsburgh, becomes first WWF wrestler to win WCW championship with victory over Booker T

FEBRUARY 27, 2000:
Beats Chris Jericho for the Intercontinental title at No Way Out

OCTOBER 22, 2000:
Wins first WWF World title, defeating The Rock at No Mercy

SEPTEMBER 10, 2001:
Briefly holds WWF Hardcore title before losing it right back to Rob Van Dam on *Raw*

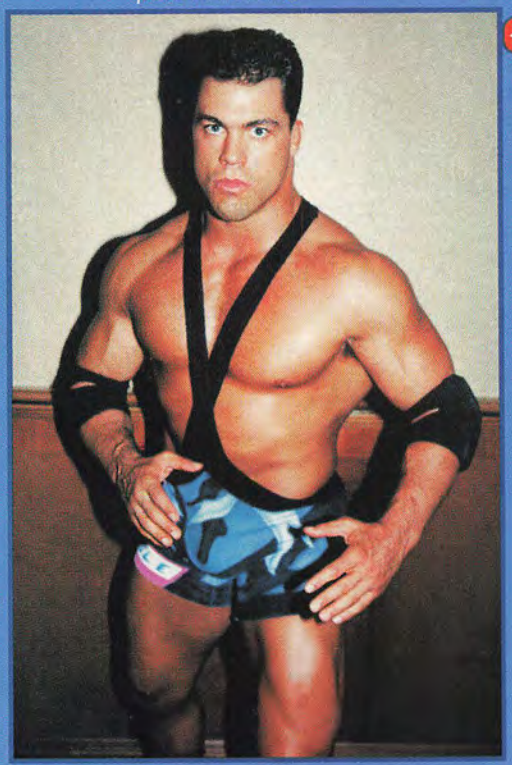
wrestling timeline

DECEMBER 9, 1968:
Born in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania

OCTOBER 26, 1996:
Makes guest appearance at ECW's High Incident event in Philly; leaves in disgust after witnessing Sandman being "crucified" by Raven, and threatens to sue Paul Heyman if he is shown on TV

NOVEMBER 14, 1999:
Makes WWF debut, defeating Shawn Stasiak at Survivor Series

JULY 31 1996:
In spite of broken neck, defeats Iranian Abbas Jadidi to win the gold medal in the heavyweight weight class at the summer Olympics in Atlanta



OCTOBER 15, 1998:
Makes pro debut in WWF developmental territory Power Pro Wrestling in Memphis, Tennessee

JANUARY 23, 2000:
Loses to a debuting Tazz at Royal Rumble, ending his WWF undefeated streak

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!

THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING BACK ISSUES

Vol. 2, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "The Angle Zone: Enter At Your Own Risk!" **60-Minute Interview:** Bob Orton Jr. **Also Inside:** Booker T, Michaels-Christian, A.J. Styles, Ray "Big Bossman" Traylor. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Edge Of Insanity! Has He Ruined His Future?" **Also Inside:** Scott D'Amore, Paul London, Orlando Jordan, Joey Matthews, Kim Neilson, Kenny Bolin, Dunn & Marcos, Simon Dean, Mana, Kane-Snitsky, Magnus & Daivari, Pat Kenney.

Vol. 3, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Hogan Steals WrestleMania!" **60-Minute Interview:** Terry Funk. **Also Inside:** Cornette vs. Heenan, Petey Williams, 10 unforgettable WrestleMania moments. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "WrestleMania 21: The Real Winners & Losers." **Also Inside:** Alexis Laree, Lance Hoyt, Shane Twins, Jack Evans, Val Venis, Arch Kincaid, Mike Mondo, Alere Littlefeather, Jeff Hammond, O.C. Boyz, Shawn Michaels.

Vol. 5, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Our Demand To The IOC: Strip Angle Of His Medal!" **60-Minute Interview:** George Steele. **Also Inside:** Randy Orton, Bobby Lashley, Ken Kennedy. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Christian's TNA Gamble: If He Wins, Everybody Wins." **Also Inside:** Aaron Stevens, Homicide, Boogeyman, Raven-Riley, Talia & April, Rory & Robbie McAlister, Colt Cabana, Mickie James.

Vol. 7, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Rey Mysterio Jr.: Too Much Man For His Own Good?" **60-Minute Interview:** J.J. Dillon. **Also Inside:** Kane, Styles-Daniels-Joe, Teddy Hart. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Sting Or Steve: The Makeup On A Man Or … The Make Up Of A Man." **Also Inside:** Brent Albright, Nattie Neidhart, Paul Birchall, Jay Lethal, Bobby Roode, Jimmy Rave, Ruckus, Kid Kash.

Vol. 9, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "'Big Brother' Batista: 'Anybody Who Abused Rey Will Pay!'" **60-Minute Interview:** Harley Race. **Also Inside:** DeGeneration X, Trish-Mickie, Chris Sabin. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** Extreme Success: "One Night That Changed The Face Of Wrestling." **Also Inside:** Chris Masters, Eric Young, Alex Shelley, A1, David Young, Sonjay Dutt, The Naturals, Matt Bentley, Elix Skipper, Homicide, Johnny Devine.

Vol. 11, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Blame Sting! He Could Have Prevented The War With Christian!" **90-Minute Interview:** Bobby Heenan. **Also Inside:** Paul Heyman, Finlay & Regal, Mick Foley. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Trish Stratus Tribute Cover." **Also Inside:** Lita, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

Vol. 13, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "DeGeneration X-Plosion! Brace Yourself For The HHH vs. HBK Feud!" **90-Minute Interview:** Paul Ormdorff. **Also Inside:** WSX, Christian-Edge-Rhino, Bobby Lashley. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "WrestleMania Time Capsules—WWE's Biggest Event Through The Years." **Also Inside:** Sting.

Vol. 15, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "WWE Overhaul! Our Plan To Shuffle The Deck." **90-Minute Interview:** Larry Zbyszko. **Also Inside:** McMahon & ECW, Mike Awesome, Colon-Flair. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "What's Up With A.J.? Some Words Of Wisdom From A Man Who Knows." **Also Inside:** Bobby Lashley, stars' greatest covers.

Vol. 17, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Melina: Too Beautiful To Be Taken Seriously?" 90-Minute Interview: Magnum T.A. **Also Inside:** Introducing/Looking Back. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "The Smackdown Curse—This Is The Title You Don't Want To Win." **Also Inside:** James Storm, Hardys vs. Cade & Murdoch, Memphis Revival, John Cena, baldies.

Vol. 18, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Legend Killer! The Hidden Truth Behind Randy Orton's Obsession." 90-Minute Interview: Bruno Sammartino. **Also Inside:** Bryan Danielson, Bob Backlund. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "The Benoit Tragedy: The Wrestling World Reacts And Remembers." **Also Inside:** Candice Michelle, Mark Henry.

Vol. 19, 2008: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Batista's Bombshell! If I Don't Beat The Undertaker, My Title Is Worthless!" 90-Minute Interview: Ted DiBiase. **Also Inside:** C.M. Punk, Cena vs. Jeff Hardy, Bryan Danielson. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Jealousy Rages: Who Will Knock Out Karen Angle?" **Also Inside:** Rey Mysterio Jr., Turnbuckle Turkeys.

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appearing on *Monday Night Raw*, when he had never even shown his face on an ROH show.

KREWDA: You're assuming that relationship is over. Cary's talked about the possibility of still running some specials on HDNet. Who knows, maybe a live special a few times a year is a better fit than the weekly TV shows, which were always like a month behind.

DEE: Heck, maybe in the near future ROH won't even need a deal with some cable company to get their show on TV. They've already had some success with the Internet pay-per-view concept, and their Video Wire Web show gets thousands of views. ROH is ahead of the curve here, hopefully not *too* far ahead.

KREWDA: And if nothing else, without the two-day long HDNet tapings they do every couple of months, ROH now has another weekend available to run house shows and bring in a little extra money.

CASTLE: You can spin it any way you want to, Frank, but the glass is half empty, not half full. There's no other way to slice it: Losing a national TV deal is a very, very bad thing.

SAKS: What's a worst-case scenario for ROH?

CASTLE: That without the television exposure and financial help they were getting from HDNet, they can't afford to keep the doors open, and they just shut down before the end of the year. I don't think that's too unrealistic a scenario. We've all heard the stories about Cary going into his own money to keep the lights on.

DEE: That would be a real shame on several fronts. For one, a lot of talented wrestlers would have no place to work. Guys like El Generico, Rod Strong, and Davey Richards may not have the size or look to ever get a job in WWE or TNA. And without the ROH exposure, they won't be able to demand as much money on the independent scene.

KREWDA: At least most of those guys are young enough to find some way to make a living. The real losers might be the fans. WWE and TNA both do what they do pretty well, but there's a whole segment of the wrestling universe that want something different. Without ROH, that would be harder to find.

CASTLE: Finally, Frank, something you and I can agree on. □

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Established stars like Davey Richards and The Briscoes have kept ROH marketable, but without a weekly show, they'll need significant help from some of the promotion's newer acquisitions.

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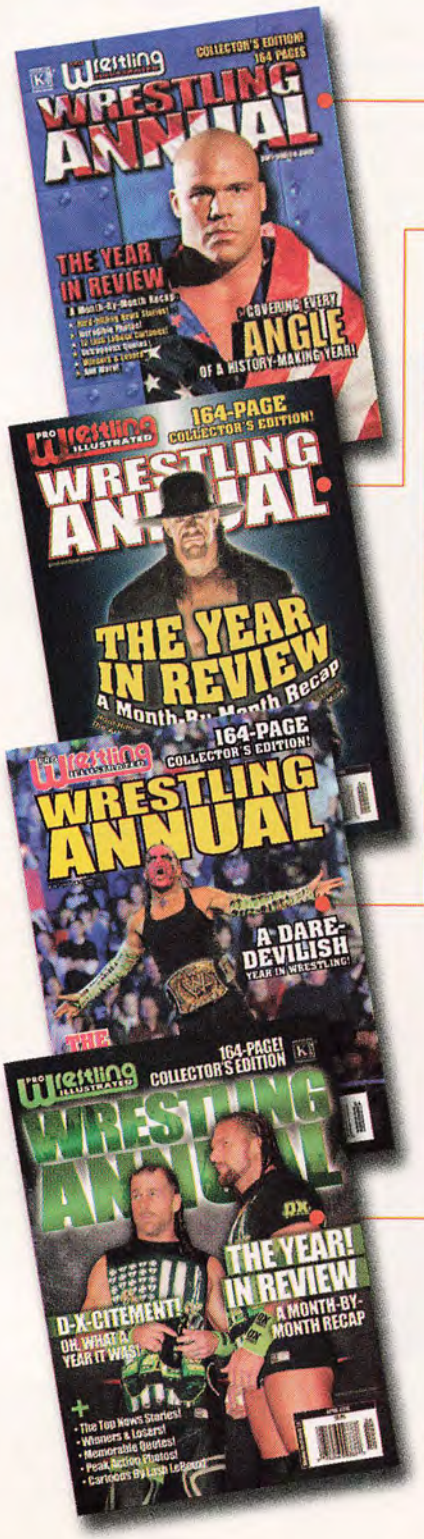

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"ROH needs to concentrate on what they've always done well—delivering great matches and creating the next generation of wrestling stars. That way, when the right business deal presents itself, they'll be ready for it."
—Frank Krewda

channel. And the buzz on that show was never all that strong outside of the fans Ring of Honor already had going in. With the right network—say a Versus or an FX—ROH could not only survive, it can grow.

CASTLE: That seems like wishful thinking to me. This isn't 1999, when the Monday Night War was burning red hot. The wrestling business is pretty soft right now. It may be harder than ever to try to sell a weekly wrestling TV show—especially one without a lot of recognizable, big name stars.

SAKS: Let's assume ROH never gets another TV deal. Then what? Can they survive without it?

CASTLE: Define "survive." I mean, there are hundreds of indies throughout the country, running shows on weekends in front of a couple hundred fans and not paying their talent. Any one of those could call themselves Ring of Honor, but would it really be the same thing?

DEE: Yeah, Cary (Silkin, ROH owner) should want more than that. After nine years in the business, I think ROH should be aiming higher. They should be getting bigger each year, not smaller. Anything less than that could be seen as failure.

KREWDA: Well, that's not really fair. Even WWE's business has hit a rough patch. If ROH can ride this out, they should be fine. If that means going a while without a TV deal, so be it. ROH needs to concentrate on what they've always done well—delivering great matches and creating the next generation of wrestling stars. That way, when the right business deal presents itself, they'll be ready for it.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

If the worst-case scenario plays out and ROH folds, Christopher Daniels could wrestle exclusively for TNA, where he is currently portraying the Suicide character. The options for his opponent, Kenny King, might be limited.

CASTLE: Cary shouldn't be waiting for the right business deal to present itself. He should be out there looking for it.

SAKS: I'm sure he is.

CASTLE: Look, I have a lot of problems with TNA, but I'll give them this much: They know the importance of making the right connections, whether that's been the Carter family, Spike TV execs, or Eric Bischoff. Meanwhile, Cary's still running ROH like a family-owned small business. I think that's why the HDNet deal collapsed.

DEE: I don't know if that was the only reason, but certainly they could have done more with that relationship. I mean, I couldn't believe it when I saw Mark Cuban

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

While both ROH champion Roderick Strong and El Generico are excellent wrestlers, they might not have the star power to entice another network to sign on with ROH.

STU SAKS: Let's start with Al. You follow ROH as closely as anyone journalist in the business. What does your gut tell you about whether the company can bounce back from losing its TV deal?

AL CASTLE: I hate to say it, but it doesn't look good. HDNet was more than just Ring of Honor's cable home. In a lot of ways, it's been propping up ROH for years now—subsidizing its entire television operation, paying the salary of one of its most talented executives (former WWE writer) Dave Lagana, and just generally making ROH look major league. Without HDNet on board, I'm not sure what you're left with.

FRANK KREWDA: Here we go again with all the doom-and-gloom talk about ROH going out of business. I feel like we've been writing about that for nine years now. Ring of Honor isn't going anywhere. Sure, this is a setback for them—a big one. But they've made it through worse before.

CASTLE: Have they? This isn't losing Bryan Danielson to WWE or changing bookers. This is Mark Cuban's cable network walking away. Now, I'm not saying the company is necessarily going to close its doors anytime soon, but I think we're going to see a far different ROH than the one we've been used to for two years now.

LOUIE DEE: But who's to say they don't just land on another cable deal? If nothing else, ROH now has a proven track record on television and an archive of some very sleek-looking shows that it can try to pitch to other networks. And, knowing how many millions of viewers WWE and TNA get each week, I have to think that one of the networks is going to be interested in picking up a wrestling show.

KREWDA: And not just any wrestling show, Lou. Ring of Honor's built a reputation for having some of the highest quality wrestling in the country. Didn't they just win the *Wrestling Observer* award for best weekly TV show? That's got to count for something.

CASTLE: Yeah, but the problem is that whatever network would consider picking up ROH wouldn't be getting the same show that aired on HDNet for two years. This isn't like *Friday Night Smackdown* jumping from MyNetworkTV to Syfy. HDNet was a big part of that show being as good as it was. We've all seen ROH's in-house produced DVDs. The production values are far below what we have come to expect over the past couple of years.

KREWDA: Granted, but I agree with Lou: Who's to say ROH can't find a deal even better than the one they had with HDNet.

DEE: It's not like HDNet was exactly the USA Network. Most people I know don't even get the

editors' roundtable

Can Ring of Honor recover after being dropped by HDnet?

"The problem is that whatever network would consider picking up ROH wouldn't be getting the same show that aired on HDNet for two years. This isn't like *Friday Night Smackdown* jumping from MyNetwork to Syfy. HDNet was a big part of that show being as good as it was."
—Al Castle

RING OF HONOR announced in January that its weekly television show on HDNet was coming to an end in April. The announcement led some observers to worry that the demise of the program would lead to the demise of ROH itself.

The Philadelphia-based company struggled for six years before reaching the brass ring of pro wrestling promotions—a weekly, prime time slot on a national cable network. Now, without a television platform, ROH finds itself not only without the national TV deal, but without the considerable financial backing provided by the Mark Cuban-owned network.

But this isn't the first time naysayers have counted out ROH, only to be proven wrong. Through major scandals, defections of top stars, and financial hardships, ROH has managed time and again to pick itself up and remain a relevant and vital part of the national wrestling picture.

Can ROH do it again? INSIDE WRESTLING Publisher Stu Saks led a conference call with Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda, Senior Writer Al Castle, and Contributing Writer Louie Dee to discuss the matter.

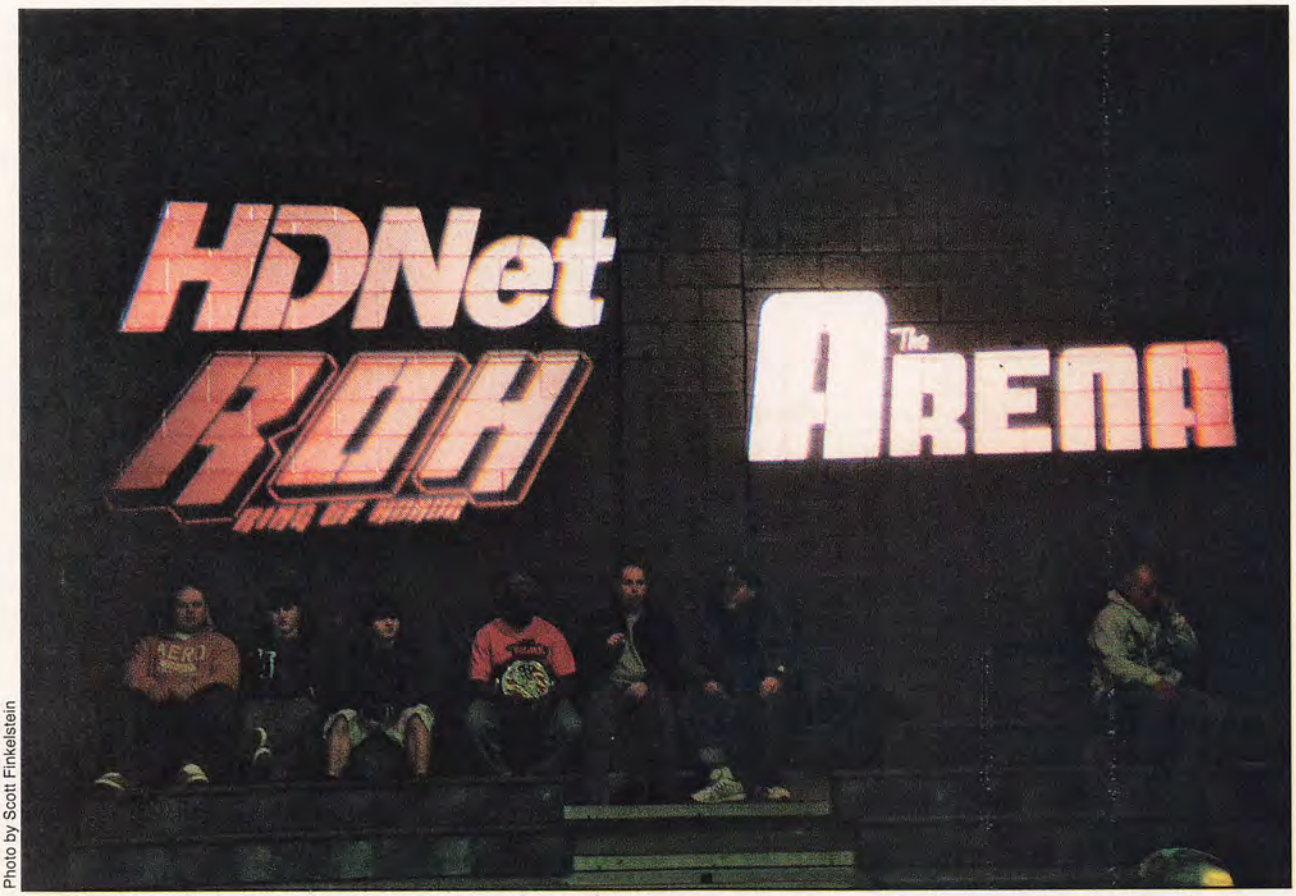


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

As Ring of Honor's agreement with HDNet comes to an end, the company faces some huge obstacles. Is this step backward going to prove catastrophic to the nine-year-old company?

In terms of singles matches, like I said before, I'll face anyone. I do think a lot of fans like to see who's the best of the big men, though, so I do get up for those matches against guys like The Big Show.

Q: Are there any super heavyweights of the past that you would have liked to wrestle against?

A: Definitely Andre the Giant. Andre was one of the all-time greats and he was someone I grew up watching. He had a lot of height on me, but, pound for pound, I'm stronger than Andre ever was. I know I could have slammed him, and that's something I think fans would have paid to see. Another guy that comes to mind is Ernie Ladd, because he was a big, bad dude and he was a hero away from the ring. He was also a two-sport star, one of the all-time great football players. So it would have been an honor to get it on with Andre or Ernie in the ring.

Q: How would you compare Mark Henry the wrestler from 1996 to today?

A: I think I'm smarter in the ring, learned more about having a game plan to each match. My style is my style. I won't surprise too many guys out there. I'm built for power, so I use it. I go straight ahead. But there are ways to use your leverage better, things like that. I was trained by the Harts and Leo Burke and they always told me that you can't just slam and stomp your way around the ring. You gotta have a game plan.

Q: You've had your fair share of injuries over the years, too. How have you compensated?

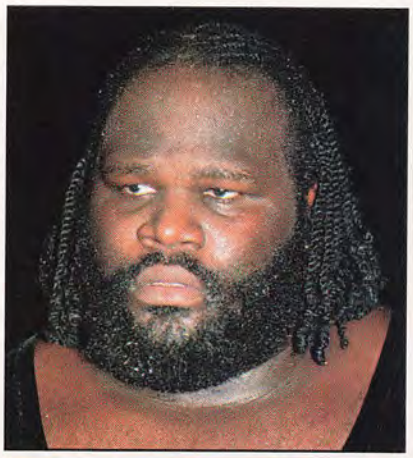
A: When I was younger, I just ignored the pain and kept on going. Now I try to listen to my body a little more. That's really all you can do.

Q: What was the best advice you've ever received in wrestling?

A: Just to respect the business and try to learn something every day. That's what I try to do. I've learned a lot from people who paved the way, like Tony Atlas. I've learned from wrestling against guys like The Undertaker. I even learned from doing some of the comedy stuff that I like to make people laugh sometimes, too.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Needless to say, Zack Ryder wasn't getting up from this slam. Riding a hot streak and with the support of the fans, maybe Henry will be able to snag that elusive world title.



"I'll do anything that helps out kids who are sick or less fortunate. As an athlete and entertainer, I just think it's important to give something back."

Q: If you had to choose one or the other, which career has been more rewarding to you: wrestling or weightlifting?

A: Impossible to choose. Fortunately, I've been able to do both.

Q: Out of the ring, you've been very active in participating in charitable causes, both with WWE and on your own. What causes are the most near and dear to Mark Henry's heart?

A: I'll do anything that helps out kids who are sick or less fortunate. I think it's important to get kids to read and make grown-ups aware of how to help kids with dyslexia, because I know what it's like to have it and grow up thinking you're dumb or there's something wrong with you. There's a lot more known about it today. As an athlete and entertainer, I just think it's important to give something back. □

"Andre was one of the all-time greats and he was someone I grew up watching. He had a lot of height on me, but, pound for pound, I'm stronger than Andre ever was."

building with a smile. That's the best way to be successful.

Q: Fifteen years is a long time for anyone to remain with the same employer nowadays, especially in the wrestling business. What has been the secret your longevity in WWE?

A: Just roll with the punches, man. Take advantage of the chances you get. Out of the ring, treat people like you want to be treated. I don't know if you can call that a secret, but that's what I try to do. I guess it works, 'cause I'm still here.

Q: Despite your longevity in WWE, the only titles you've held have been two now-defunct belts—the ECW title and the European title—the latter of which was given to you as a gift by Jeff Jarrett. Do you consider it disappointing that you've never held one of the world titles, or even the Intercontinental or U.S. title?

A: Disappointing? No, not really. Let me put it this way. Winning one of the world championships is the ultimate goal, but, you know, whatever is meant to be is gonna be. I still feel like I can win it, but if it never happens, well, there's a lot of great wrestlers who never won it.

loosen up a lot more, and you don't mind poking fun at yourself. There really isn't one side or the other that you think is better suited to you?

A: No, not at all, because I'm still the same person no matter what. My fans know what Mark Henry is all about. I try to live by something Ron Simmons told me a long time ago. I come to the ring in a bad mood and I leave the

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Henry bristles at the notion that his clean victory over Sheamus on *Raw* was an upset. He has a point. Why would "The World's Strongest Man" ever be considered the underdog?

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Henry likes to test himself against the biggest men in the sport. He may not have a winning record against The Big Show, but he'll never take a backward step against anyone, Big Show included.

Q: Do you believe in the old wrestling adage that a good big man will almost always beat a good little man?

A: What do you think *[laughs]?* I more than just believe it, man, I'm living proof.

Q: I asked you that question for two reasons. First of all, a lot of your recent tag teams have been with cruiserweight partners, and your pairing with Evan Bourne prior to his injury was arguably the best in your career. Do you think the pairing of a super heavyweight and a high-flyer works better than two super heavyweights? Second of all, in singles matches, is it more challenging for you to face another big man or to go against someone who lacks your size and power but has the edge in speed?

A: Every situation and team is different. I do think that a lot of the best tag teams are guys with different styles. You mentioned Evan. He's definitely a guy who is fun to team with, because he's got so many moves. Add my power into it, and you really got something.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Mark Henry

"I come to the ring in a bad mood and I leave the building with a smile."

OVER THE COURSE of his 15-year career in WWE, former Olympic weightlifter Mark Henry has seen and undergone a lot of changes. His persona has varied from glowering brutish heel to soft-spoken and generally mild-mannered fan favorite (the characterization his peers say most closely resembles his out-of-the-ring disposition). He's drawn laughs as the comedic "Sexual Chocolate" and "Mark-Swoggle," inspired fear as a thug for hire, and played it straight as a no-frills strongman.

Indeed, the one constant in "The World's Strongest Man's" career has been his awesome raw power. There is a not a fellow super heavyweight the 392-pound behemoth cannot lift and slam. While Henry will never be a speed merchant or a technical marvel, he packs a heavy wallop and has been known to take opponents' best shots without even flinching.

In recent months, former ECW champion Henry has been dividing his attention between tag team and singles wrestling. In addition to taking on solo matches at house shows, he has teamed with MVP (prior to his departure from WWE), Evan Bourne, and Yoshi Tatsu. In one of his biggest recent singles accomplishments, Henry cleanly defeated former WWE champion and defending King of the Ring winner, Seamus, on ***Raw.***

In the week following the victory over Seamus, Henry spoke with Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer. He explained why he did not consider the win over Sheamus to be an upset, talked about what it takes to achieve longevity in WWE, and outlined some of his upcoming goals.

"I've faced lots of tough guys in WWE and beat most of 'em. Sheamus wasn't the first person to go down to the World's Strongest Slam and he won't be the last."

Q: Congratulations on your recent winning streak. It had to feel good to get a decisive win on television over Sheamus in a match where he was favored to win.

A: Thank you. But I don't know why people are calling it an upset. I've faced lots of tough guys in WWE and beat most of 'em. Sheamus wasn't the first person to go down to the World's Strongest Slam and he won't be the last.

Q: But he is a two-time former WWE champion and has been up near the top for most of the past 18 months.

A: Don't get me wrong. The dude is tough. I'm just saying that I know in my heart that I can beat anyone around, and I think I've proved it over the years.

Q: Is the win over Sheamus a calling card to the rest of WWE that Mark Henry is still a force to be reckoned with?

A: I think they already knew that. They should. If they don't know, I'll be glad to beat some sense into them. Don't matter who it is, "The World's Strongest Man" can whup 'em.

Q: That sounds like the old Mark Henry talking. You are currently being cheered by the fans, but some would argue that you are more effective as a heel. Do you prefer one role to the other?

A: I wouldn't say there's an old Mark Henry or a new one. I don't change. My message is the same no matter what: Somebody's gonna get it *(laughs)*.

Q: When you've wrestled as a heel, you have one of the most intimidating death stares in the business. As a fan favorite, you seem to

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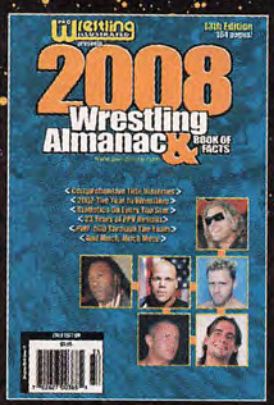

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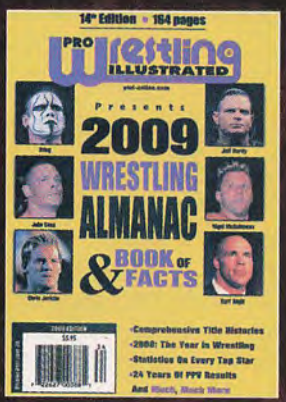

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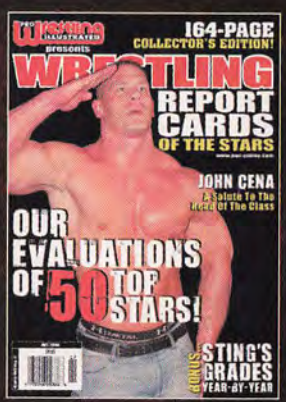

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(July 2009)
We might ask the wrestlers to get them signed by their parents! 164 pages.

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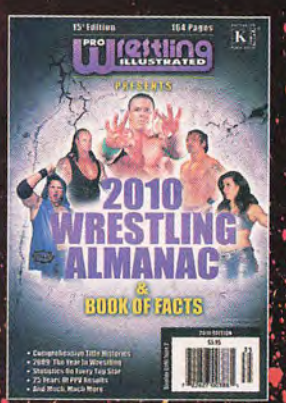
It had been nine years since Triple-H last topped the list, and many criticized our choice. But based on his in-ring success, nobody was more deserving of the honor. 164 pages.



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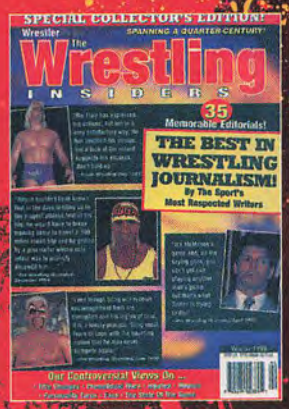

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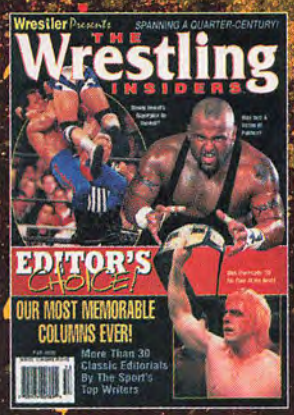

WRESTLING INSIDERS (Fall 2000)
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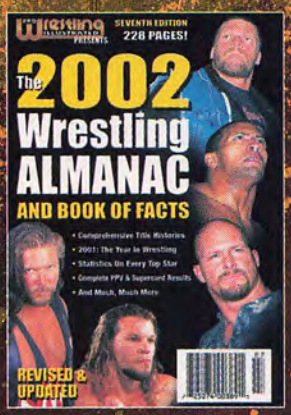
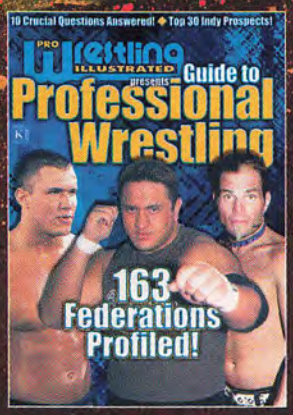


2002 WRESTLING ALMANAC
The seventh annual edition updates our historical records and takes a look back at the year 2001.



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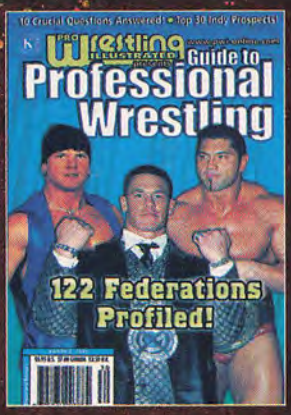

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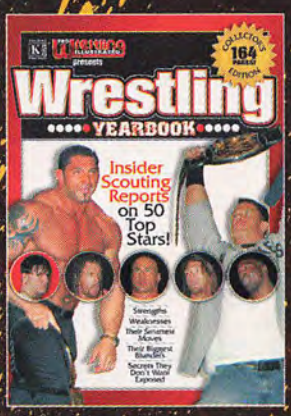
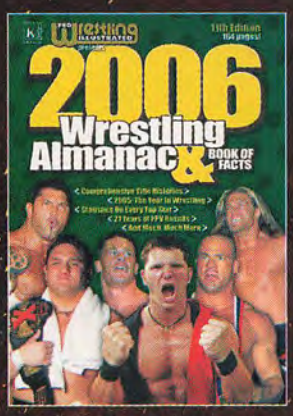
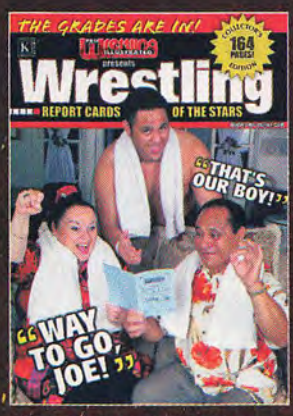


PWI WRESTLING YEARBOOK (FALL 2005)
Insider scouting reports on 50 stars, color pinups galore. 164 pages.



2006 WRESTLING ALMANAC
Pay-per-view and title lineage updates, a look back at the top stories of 2005, plus much more.



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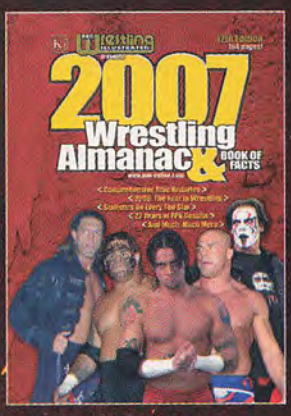

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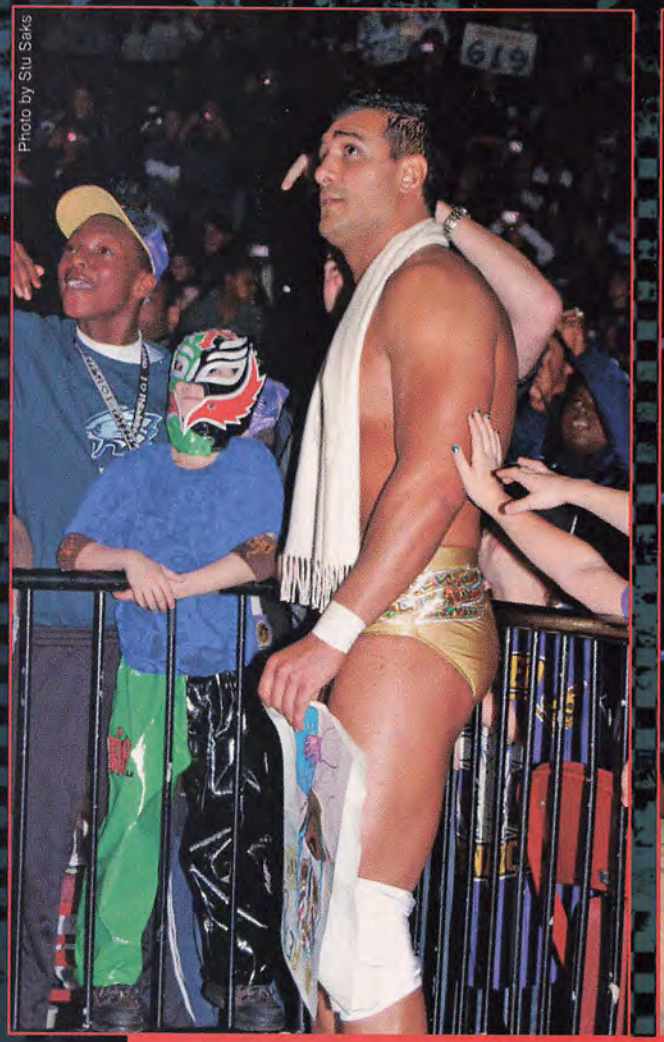
2006 in review, plus pay-per-view rundown, title histories, and much more.



Del Rio steals a homemade sign from a young Rey Mysterio Jr. supporter (left) and callously ruins it (right). It's a sure bet that WWE officials would rather Del Rio connect with the fans as Mysterio does.

the crowd cost him and his team several tag team and trios bouts.

No doubt, the best thing for everyone would be for a WWE wrestler to force-feed Alberto some humble pie. The more humility Del Rio demonstrates, the more fans are likely to recognize his copious talents and the more likely his popularity is to grow, as well as his value to WWE as it tries to gain a stronger foothold south of the border.

Indeed, nobody likes a braggart, especially one hailing from foreign aristocracy whose primary message is, "I'm better than you." There's no mystery as to why fans refuse to embrace Del Rio, at least until he is knocked down a peg or two.

The real mystery is, who's going to do it? Perhaps Christian, who ran Del Rio off an injured Kofi Kingston during a recent post-match attack on *Raw*, will be the man to deflate Del Rio. But humbling Del Rio, to date, has been easier said than done. Several fan favorites have attempted to embarrass Del Rio only to end up embarrassed themselves. Rey Mysterio Jr. had some fleeting moments of success against him. But Del Rio was generally judged to be the victor of their intense feud. Kingston, Daniel Bryan, R-Truth, Chris Masters, and even world champions The Miz and Edge have felt the effects of Del Rio's rolling cross-armbar.

Also, winning the 40-Man Royal Rumble, just as he predicted he would per his destiny, certainly did nothing to hurt Del Rio's confidence. The more successful he is, the more the fans seem to resent Del Rio, which is precisely why he can't garner their support.

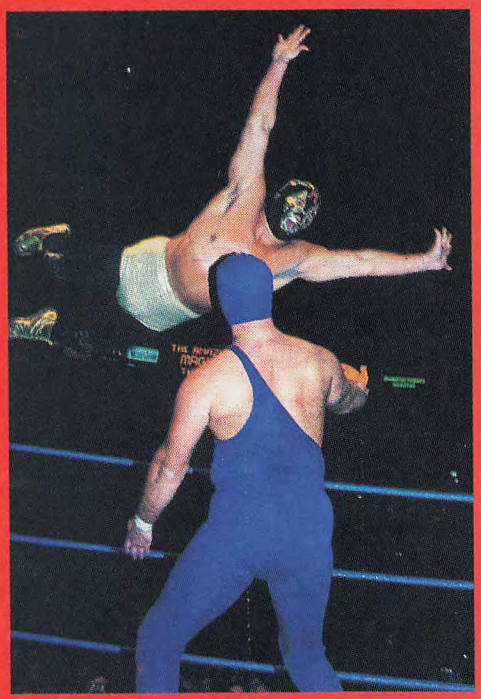
"He brags and then he backs it up with victories," explains *Raw* announcer Michael Cole. "He's good and he knows he's good, and the WWE Universe knows he's good. Yet instead of giving him the respect and accolades he deserves, the fans give him nothing but hate."

Perhaps the respect and accolades will come only after somebody turns Del Rio's smile upside-down. □

IS IT IN THE GENES?

If Alberto Del Rio truly is destined for greatness, as he so often says, some of the credit should go to his relatives. After all, when your uncles are Dos Caras, Mil Mascaras, and El Sicodelico—arguably the most talented trio of brothers in Mexican wrestling history—you are drawing from a very deep genetic pool. Here's a quick look at the family members from whom Del Rio inherits his talents:

Dos Caras: Alberto Del Rio's father and a multiple Mexican national titleholder, Caras was considered by many to be the greatest heavyweight ever to come from Mexico. Caras was best known for his ability to blend the high-flying lucha and mat-based U.S. styles so well. Caras still wrestles occasionally on Mexican independent cards.

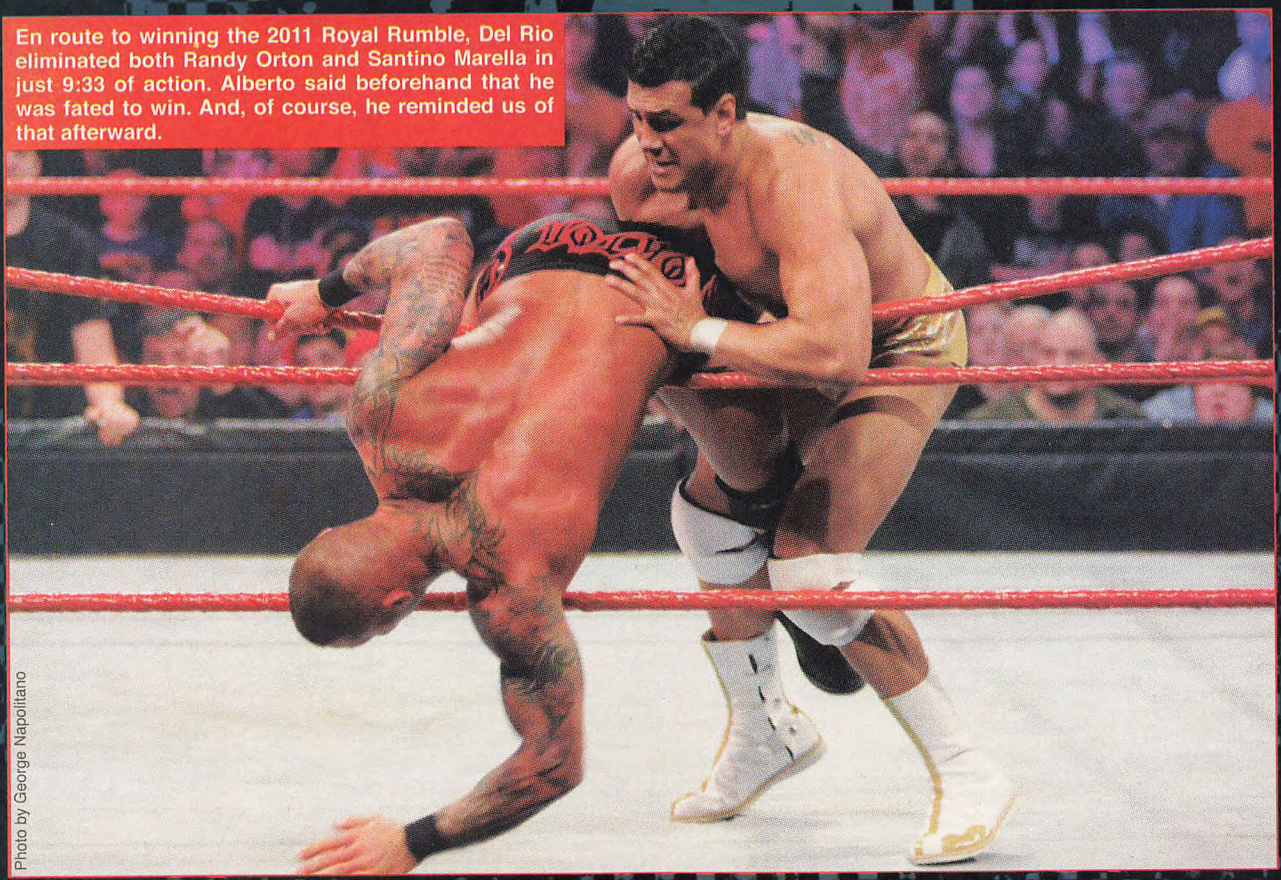


Del Rio's uncle, the graceful Mil Mascaras

Mil Mascaras: Alberto's uncle and Dos Caras' older brother is the most famous masked luchador in wrestling history. His high-flying style and charisma has influenced everyone from Jushin Liger to Rey Mysterio Jr. He feuded with Superstar Billy Graham for the WWWF World title and held a number of Mexican national titles. A true celebrity in Mexico, he has starred in many movies based around his character.

El Sicodelico: The oldest of the brothers, Sicodelico never achieved the same level of fame, notoriety, or singles success as either Mascaras or Dos Caras. At a powerful 246 pounds, Sicoledico used power moves and aerial strikes with equal aplomb to finish off opponents. Sicodelico could pull off a plancha just as easily as clamping on a bearhug.

—Gerry Strauss



En route to winning the 2011 Royal Rumble, Del Rio eliminated both Randy Orton and Santino Marella in just 9:33 of action. Alberto said beforehand that he was fated to win. And, of course, he reminded us of that afterward.

Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano

thing: People don't like him and he's quite content with that fact.

"You know that I've always been extremely proud of my Mexican heritage," said 2004 WWE Hall-of-Fame Inductee Tito Santana during a recent phone interview. "Some say I was one of the greatest Latino wrestlers to ever step inside of a ring, and I am humbled to be recognized in that way. Even now, I get letters from fans telling me that I was an inspiration to them because I represented them with dignity and class. But this Del Rio character does no such thing. Sure, he has his Spanish ring announcer and his mariachi band, but he uses his culture and native tongue to insult the fans. He uses his wealth to mock them."

Those are some harsh words from a man not usually given to dramatic statements, especially in retirement. And just think for a minute: If Santana burns so hotly just watching Del Rio from afar, imagine how the average fan feels about the Mexican braggart. How would you feel if you had to sit there and listen to Del Rio ramble on about how superior he and his country are?

And, make no mistake, Del Rio is no "Golden Boy" in Mexico, either. Even before arriving in WWE, Del Rio, as Dos Caras Jr., angered Mexican fans by adopting an increasingly narcissistic persona before making a full heel turn. His primping and playing to

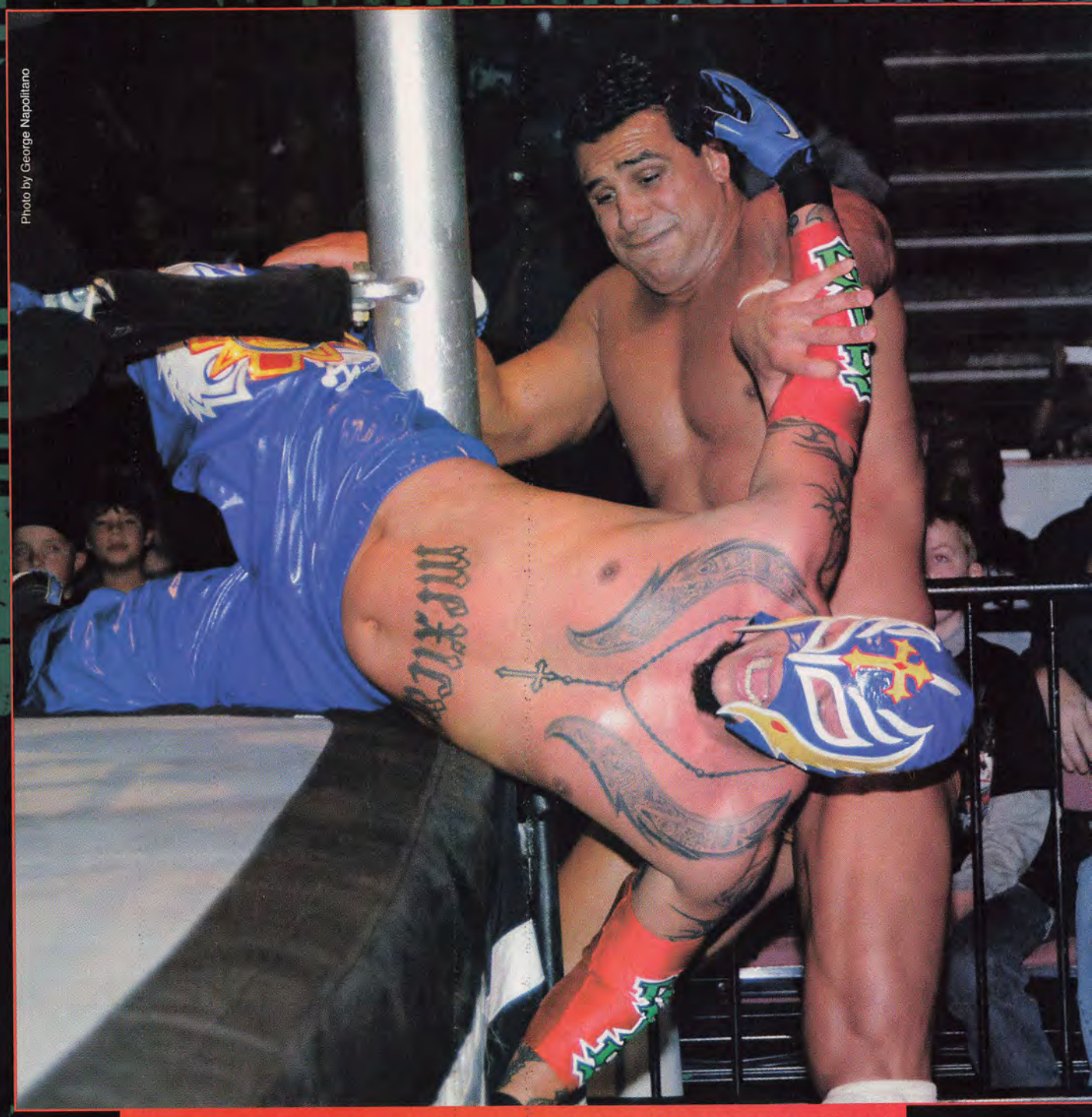


Photo by George Napolitano

Perhaps the only thing that frustrates fans more than Del Rio's phony smile and haughtiness is his talent in the ring. The versatile Mexican can get rough (above) or grapple effectively on the mat (opposite). And he certainly has a dislike for one Rey Mysterio Jr.

From the moment he burst onto the WWE scene in 2010, Del Rio has done everything in his power to let the fans and his locker-room peers know that he is superior to them in every way. He dresses in classy suits, even in the ring, where he delivers promos that drip with condescension. He makes his ring entrance in obnoxiously expensive cars, simply to flaunt his wealth. He even employs his own personal ring announcer, Ricardo Rodriguez, whose overenthusiastic overtures only turn more and more fans against Del Rio, especially since he demands that his introductions are delivered in Spanish only.

It all makes for good showmanship, but it must also makes WWE officials cringe just a bit—and for good reason. WWE has tapped into the Mexican market recently with some promising results. In Mexico, WWE sees tremendous potential for growth. The handsome Del Rio, who has demonstrated an ability to wrestle brilliantly in a variety of styles, both in Mexico and in the U.S., would be the ideal candidate to serve as the face of WWE's push into Mexico and other Hispanic markets, except for one

ARROGANT ALBERTO

WON'T SOMEBODY PLEASE TURN THAT SMILE UPSIDE DOWN?

Since arriving in the WWE last year, Alberto Del Rio has made a name for himself as one of the most egomaniacal superstars in wrestling. Is that the type of man WWE wants to lead its expansion into Mexico?

By Gerry Strauss

IS ALBERTO DEL RIO supremely talented? Sure. Does he come from a legendary wrestling family? Absolutely. Has he already garnered impressive wins over a variety of top WWE superstars? Without a doubt. Does that give him the right to act like he is above everyone else in the entire WWE Universe? Not a chance. WWE officials are thrilled with the rapid ascension of the Mexican superstar, but they are also quite worried that his own arrogance is his most dangerous opponent.

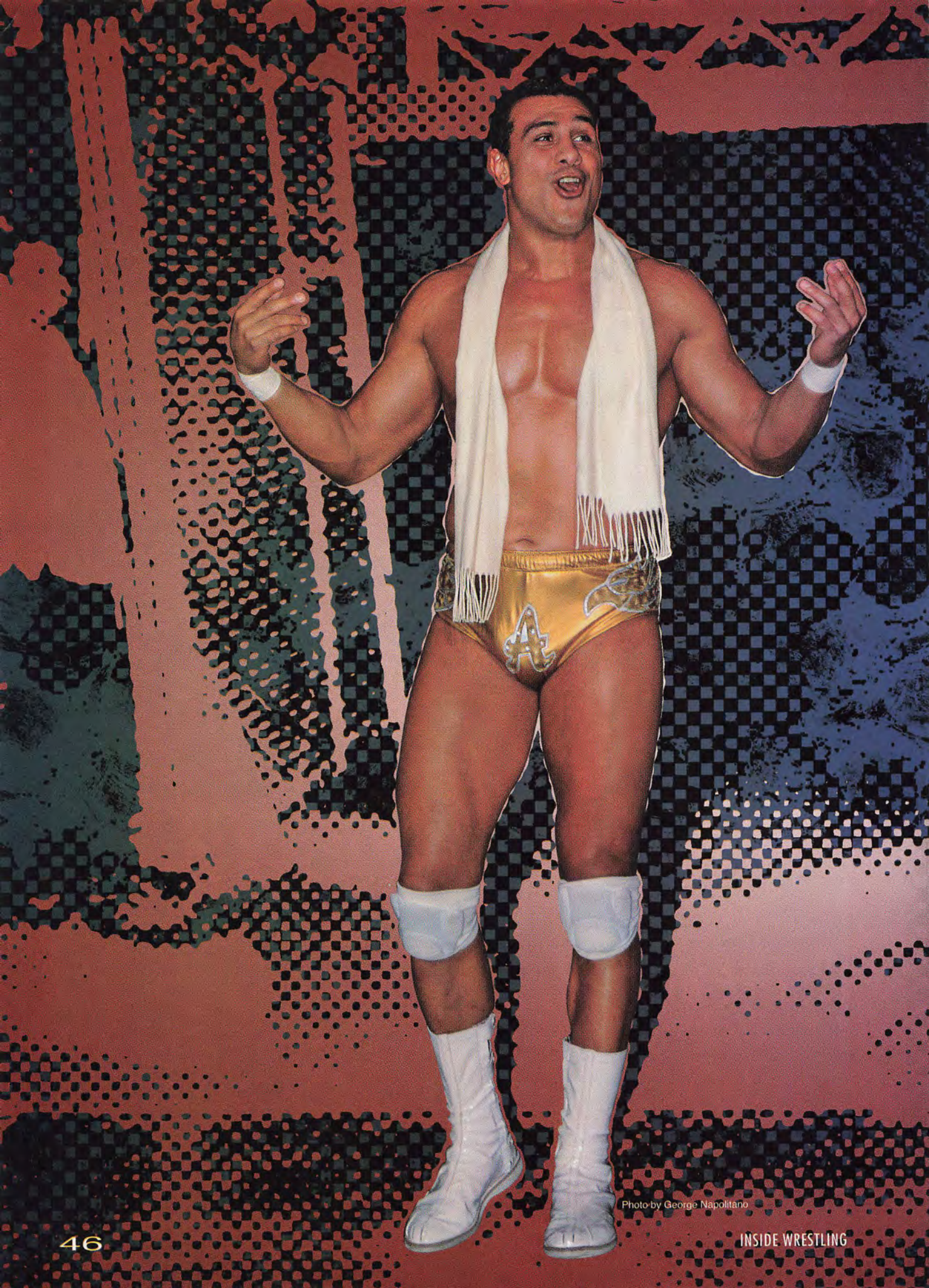
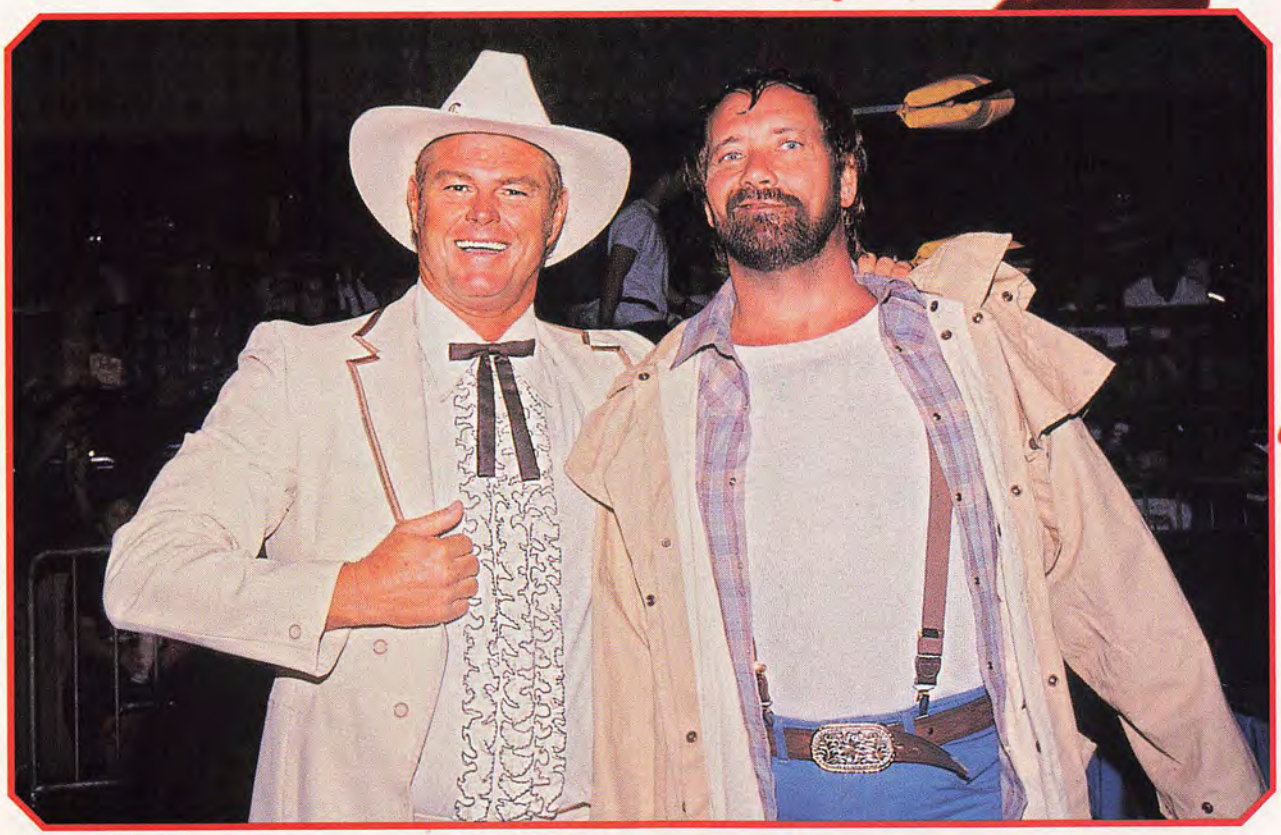


Photo by George Napolitano

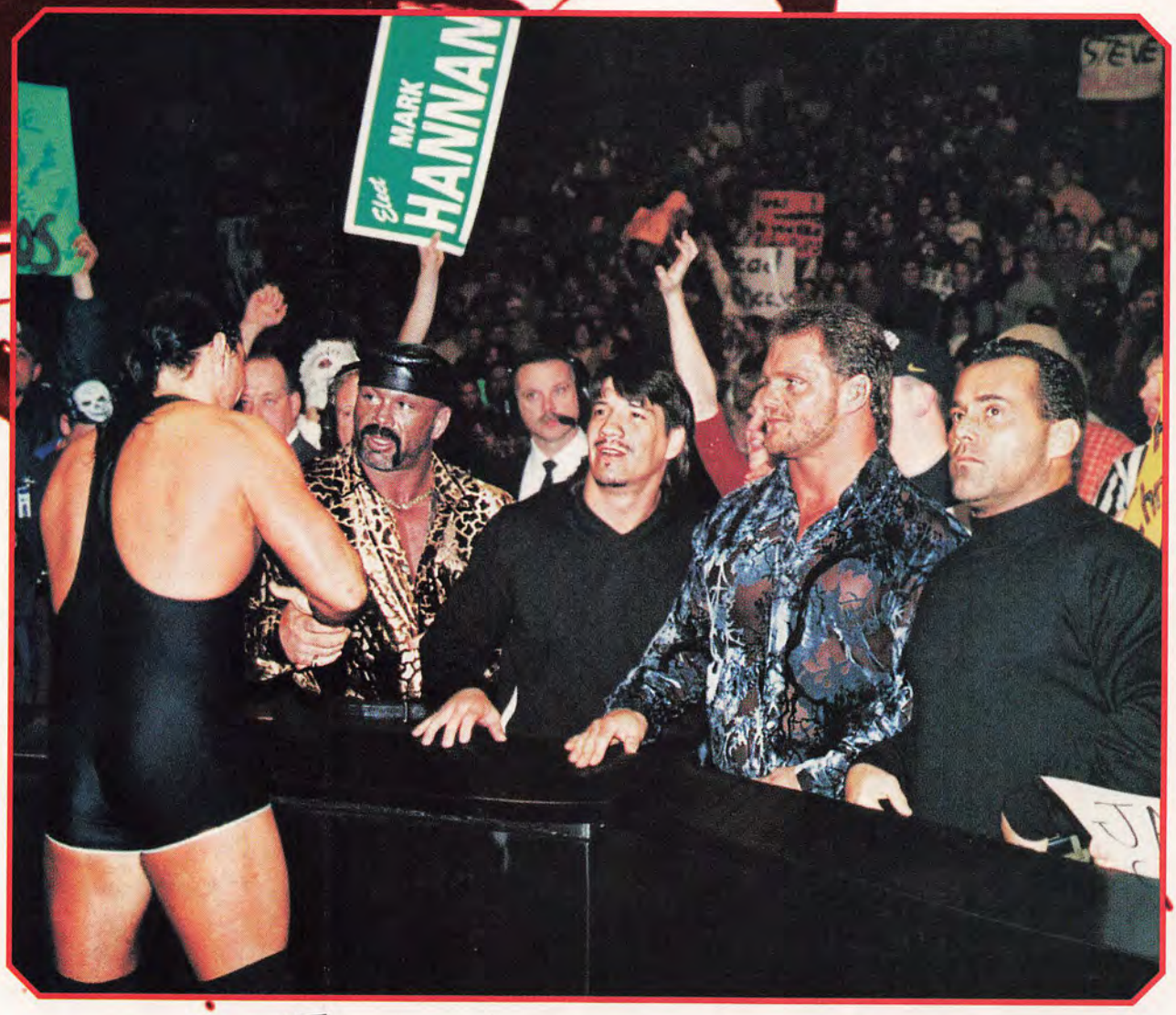
THE NETWORK 20

Various Members: Cyrus (manager), Steve Corino, Rhyno, Yoshihiro Tajiri, Scotty Anton, Jack Victory
Time Span: 1999-2000
Mission Statement: To represent the interests of TNN executives in ECW's on-air product
Impact: Before the term "dramatized reality television" became a staple of pop culture, ECW pioneered the concept with The Network. The faction's leader, Don "Cyrus" Callis, was intended to be a caricature of the real-life executives at TNN—ECW's cable home. As such, Cyrus routinely interrupted ECW's Friday night television show to protest the show's provocative content. To aid him in cleaning up ECW, Cyrus recruited "The King Of Old School" Steve Corino and other like-minded wrestlers who rejected the ECW's hardcore principles. The Network gave ECW a ready-made excuse for actually having to tone down its raunch, while giving hardcore fans an easy target in the self-righteous faction.
Why They Split: Cyrus ultimately "cancelled" ECW's weekly television show on TNN. He went on to lead Rhyno to the ECW World title just before the company folded in 2001.



19 THE STUD STABLE

Various Members: Col. Robert Parker (manager), Bunkhouse Buck, Terry Funk, Arn Anderson, Meng, Kurasawa, Dick Slater, Steve Austin, Blacktop Bully
Time Span: 1994-1996
Mission Statement: To use southern-style, smash-mouth "rasslin'" to conquer WCW
Impact: Since the early-1980s, Robert Fuller had led various groups dubbed The Stud Stable, including in Memphis' Continental Wrestling Federation and in Smokey Mountain Wrestling. But it was when Fuller, now renamed Col. Robert Parker, brought the act to WCW in the mid-1990s that his vision for a southern-style supergroup finally got national attention. With longtime partner Jimmy "Bunkhouse Buck" Golden by his side, Parker recruited some of the roughest rednecks in the sport and took aim at a southern wrestling legend—Dusty Rhodes. The Stud Stable came up short when they took on Rhodes, his son Dustin, and The Nasty Boys in a War Games match at 1994's Fall Brawl.
Why They Split: In 1995, Meng left to join the Dungeon of Doom, and Anderson left to rejoin the Horsemen. Parker abandoned remaining members Bunkhouse Buck and Dick Slater to take up with Harlem Heat's manager, Sherri.



THE RADICALZ 18

Various Members: Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, Dean Malenko, Perry Saturn
Time Span: 2000-2001
Mission Statement: To bring the best of hard-hitting, internationally influenced, light heavyweight wrestling to the WWF
Impact: Who you calling a "vanilla midget"? Frustrated with the backstage politics that held them back in WCW, the four like-minded light heavyweights jumped ship to the WWF in January of 2000, looking for a fresh start. Benoit, who abruptly left WCW days after winning the company's World championship, led the group. They debuted sitting at ringside at a January *Monday Night Raw*. With their compact size and dynamic ring style, the quartet represented a type of wrestling that fans had been clamoring for in the WWF, and denied, for years.
Why They Split: Benoit left the group in 2001 and became a fan favorite. Guerrero disappeared from WWF television for an extended period because of an elbow injury. Saturn and Malenko briefly competed as a tag team with The Radicalz name until Malenko retired later that year.

THE ALLIANCE

17

Various Members: Shane and Stephanie McMahon (managers), Steve Austin, Booker T, Rob Van Dam, Kurt Angle, The Dudley Boys, "Diamond" Dallas Page, Chavo Guerrero Jr., Kanyon, Billy Kidman, Hugh Morrus, Sean O'Haire, Sean Stasiak, Mike Awesome

Time Span: 2001

Mission Statement: To combine the forces of WCW and ECW and take over the WWF

Impact: More than just another faction, The Alliance was essentially the product of the merger of two wrestling companies—WCW and ECW. WWF Chairman Vince McMahon acquired the remnants of his former competitors after they went out of business in 2001. But before he could figure out what to do with them, McMahon's two children pulled the rug out from other their dad by seizing control of the dormant promotions.

Why They Split: The Alliance was forced to disband after losing a five-on-five elimination bout to Team WWF at the 2001 Survivor Series. Angle defected from the Alliance during the bout to help Team WWF get the win.

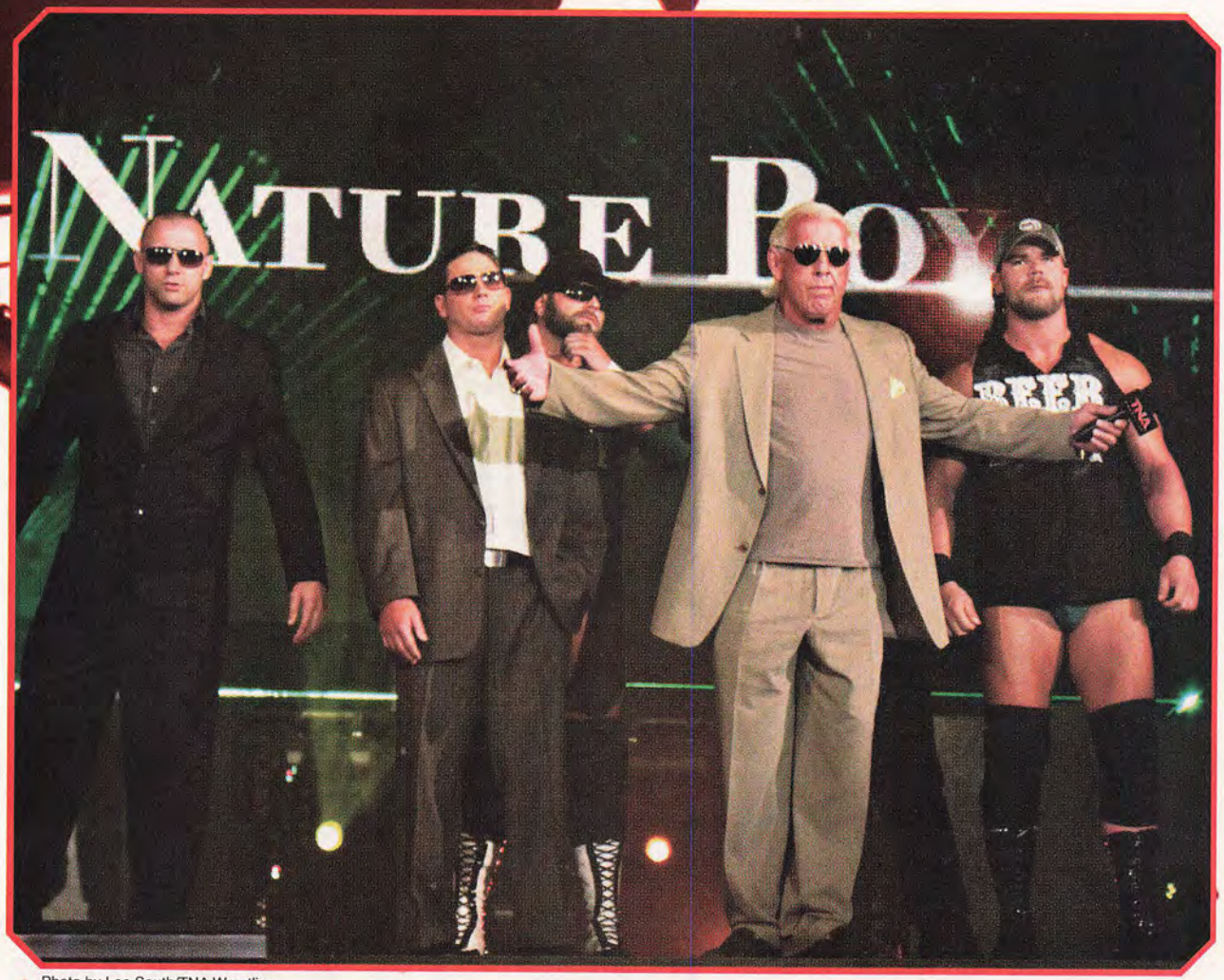


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

FORTUNE 16

Various Members: Ric Flair (manager), AJ Styles, James Storm, Robert Roode, Kazarian, Douglas Williams, Matt Morgan, Desmond Wolfe, Chelsea

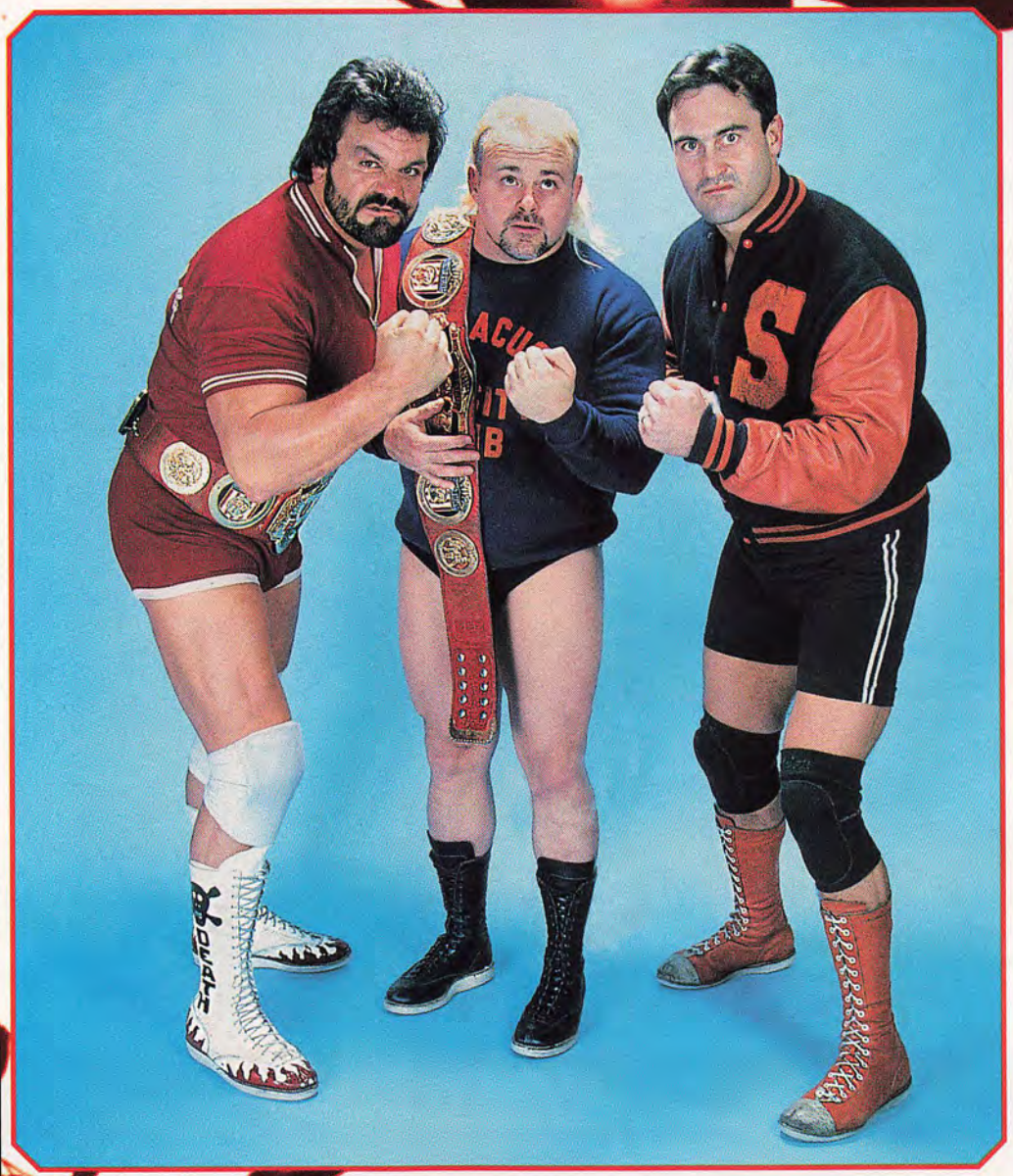
Time Span: 2010-present

Mission Statement: To collect TNA's championships ... in style

Impact: When Fortune was formed in 2010, some cynics thought the group was nothing more than a shameless attempt by TNA to have Flair lead a four-finger gesturing heel faction without infringing on WWE's intellectual property. And while the group's members did emulate the legendary Four Horsemen in their fashion sense and penchant for partying, they also embodied some of the best, young, original talent TNA had to offer. When Styles and his cohorts finally turned on Eric Bischoff's Immortal faction this past February, the Impact Zone was all too happy to embrace the group.

Why They Split: Although Williams and Morgan left the group, Fortune is still going strong. Its members became fan favorites when they turned on the rest of Immortal on a February *Impact*.

15 THE VARSITY CLUB



Various Members: Kevin Sullivan, Mike Rotundo, Rick Steiner, Steve Williams, Dan Spivey
Time Span: 1987-1989
Mission Statement: To use their amateur wrestling background to defeat opponents
Impact: Taking to heart the "wrestling" part of pro wrestling, Kevin Sullivan recruited two accomplished collegiate grapplers, Syracuse's Mike Rotundo, and Michigan's Rick Steiner, to form The Varsity Club. Wearing their lettermen jackets, the trio used their technical prowess in feuds against the likes of Ronnie and Jimmy Garvin and The Road Warriors. Steiner's departure threatened to bring down the Club, but the additions of "Dr. Death" Williams—a University of Oklahoma alum—and Spivey, from the University of Georgia, only made the group bigger and more intimidating. Though they didn't collect very much gold, The Varsity Club showed that fundamentals still played an important role in professional wrestling.
Why They Split: In 1989, Williams left the group, followed by Spivey, who teamed with Sid Vicious in The Skyscrapers. Rotundo, Sullivan, and Steiner reunited as The Varsity Club for one night at Starrcade 1999.

14 THE MILLION-DOLLAR CORPORATION

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Various Members: Ted DiBiase Sr. (manager), Irwin R. Schyster, Nikolai Volkoff, Tatanka, Bam Bam Bigelow, Kama, King Kong Bundy, Sycho Sid, 1-2-3 Kid
Time Span: 1994-1995
Mission Statement: To do the bidding of their wealthy employer, Ted DiBiase
Impact: With his own in-ring career behind him, Ted DiBiase took a new route to WWF success in 1994: He bought the World championship from Andre the Giant. Proving that everyone, indeed, has a price, DiBiase spent top dollar to assemble an impressive lineup of henchmen. They included his former tag team partner, I.R.S., Native American, Tatanka (who shocked fans by selling out to DiBiase at SummerSlam 1994), and a down-on-his-luck Volkoff, who came out of retirement to work for DiBiase. Bundy, Bigelow, and Kama further added size and muscle to the faction, which was front and center in the main event of WrestleMania XI, when Bigelow took on NFL Hall of Famer Lawrence Taylor.
Why They Split: Bigelow left the faction after being mistreated by DiBiase following his WrestleMania XI loss. Several other members left WWE later that year. DiBiase briefly created a new Corporation with Sid and 1-2-3 Kid. After that group dissolved, DiBiase briefly managed Steve Austin before leaving the WWF in May 1996.

13 THE FIRST FAMILY

Various Members: Jimmy Hart (manager), Andy Kaufman, Austin Idol, Chick Donovan, The Nightmares, Kevin Sullivan, Wayne Ferris, Kamala, Koko Ware, Rick Rude, Randy Savage, Kamala, Bobby Eaton, Super Destroyer, King Kong Bundy, Plowboy Frazier

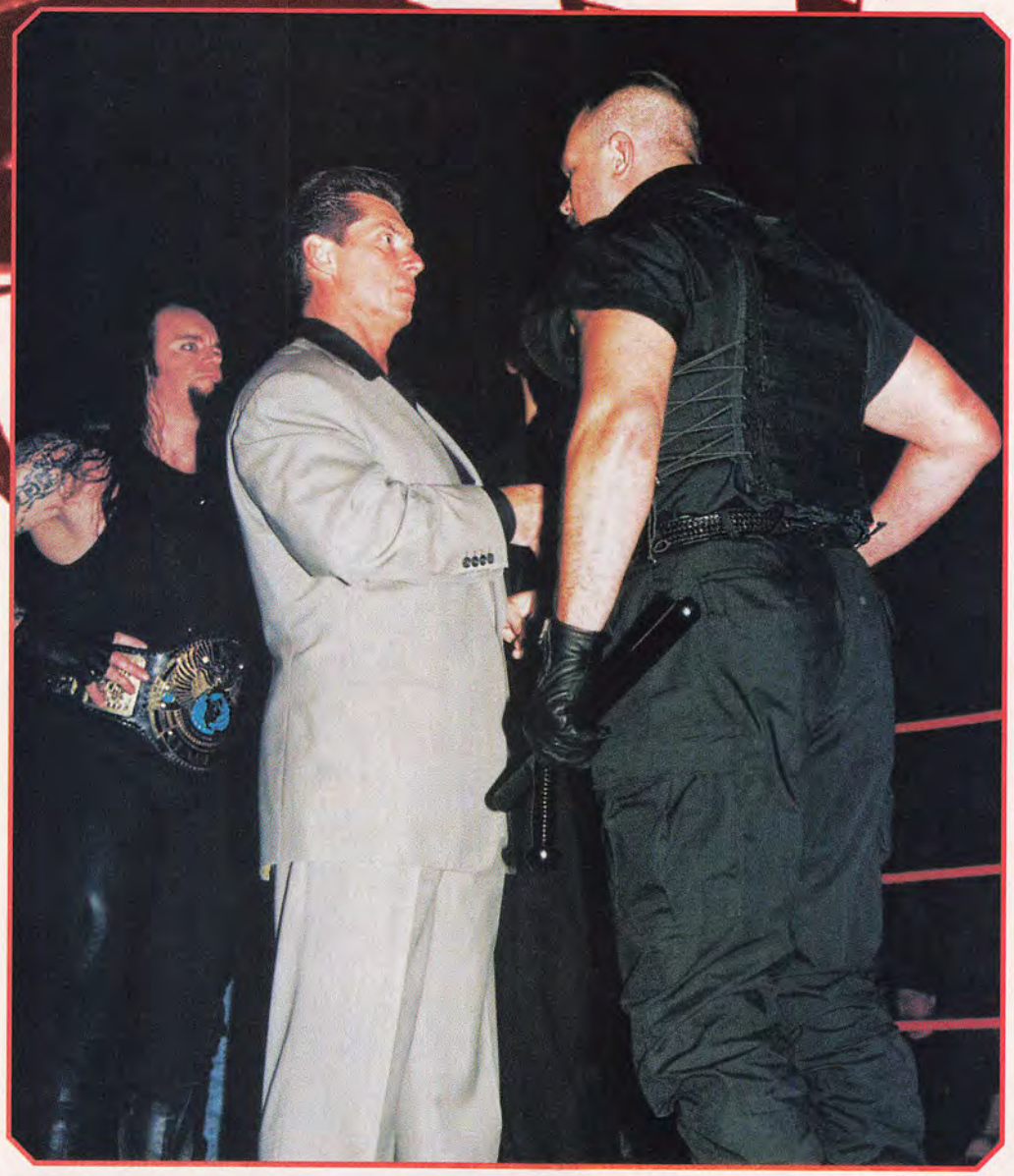
Time Span: 1981-1984

Mission Statement: To humiliate and dethrone the "King Of Memphis," Jerry Lawler

Impact: Before he wore airbrushed blazers and cackled into a megaphone in the WWF, Jimmy Hart led one of the biggest, baddest wrestling stables the sport had ever seen. And, although his First Family included past and future world champions, the crown jewel of Hart's faction was actually a scrawny, standup comedian. With his recruitment of Andy Kaufman, Hart brought national attention to his campaign to humiliate and unseat perennial Southern heavyweight champ and Memphis icon Jerry "The King" Lawler. But backing up the loudmouth comic were some true heavyweights.

Why They Split: Jimmy Hart was hired by the WWF in 1984, leaving behind his Memphis charges. In 1998 he resurrected the First Family name as a mid-card faction primarily featured on *WCW Saturday Night*.

12 THE CORPORATE MINISTRY



Various Members: Vince McMahon (manager), Shane McMahon, The Undertaker, Triple-H, Chyna, The Acolytes, The Mean Street Posse, The Big Boss Man, Mideon, Viscera
Time Span: 1999
Mission Statement: To combine the power and influence of Vince McMahon and The Undertaker to control all of the WWF
Impact: Created from the merger of two other powerful, feuding factions—Shane McMahon's Corporation and The Undertaker's Ministry of Darkness—The Corporate Ministry was instantly one of the largest and most powerful factions the WWF had ever seen. The group gained even more influence when it revealed as its "higher power" none other than WWE chairman Vince McMahon. With that kind of juice, they were just the right match for two of the most beloved heroes in the WWF's history, The Rock and Steve Austin, who feuded with The Corporate Ministry throughout much of 1999.
Why They Split: Austin beat The Undertaker for the WWF title, and again in a rematch with a stipulation that called for Vince McMahon to disappear from WWF television. Soon afterward, The Undertaker formed a tag team with The Big Show, leaving his Corporate Ministry followers behind.

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11 NATION OF DOMINATION

Various Members: Clarence Mason (manager), Faarooq, The Rock, Mark Henry, D-Lo Brown, Crush, Kama Mustafa, Savio Vega, Ahmed Johnson, JC Ice, Wolfie D, Owen Hart

Time Span: 1996-1998

Mission Statement: To rise to the top of WWF "by any means necessary"

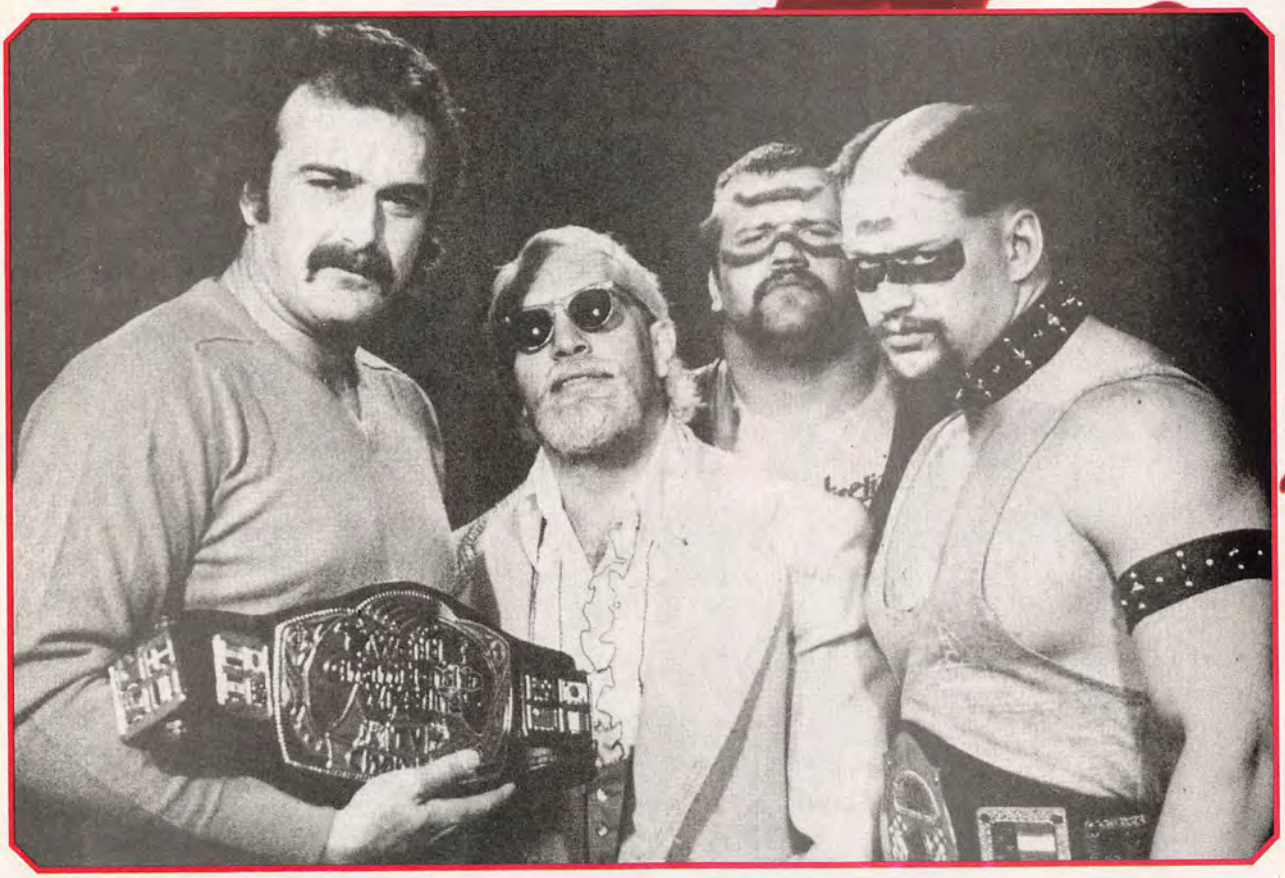
Impact: The Nation, which began as a militant faction of thugs under the rule of Ron "Faarooq" Simmons, fared well in feuds with other WWF gangs, including The Disciples of Apocalypse and Los Boricuas. When The Rock took over control of the Nation in 2008, it evolved into an Afro-centric stable of smooth cats, such as "Sexual Chocolate" and The Godfather. That version of the Nation had a memorable feud with DeGeneration-X. It was The Rock's charisma as mouthpiece of the faction that helped launch him as one of the biggest stars of our time.

Why They Split: Hart defected from the group late in 1998 because he couldn't work with The Rock. Henry and Brown seized control of the Nation, assaulting and kicking out The Rock and Kama, who had transformed into The Godfather. Brown and Henry briefly kept the Nation name alive as a tag team.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

MAIN EVENT MAFIA 10

Various Members: Kurt Angle, Kevin Nash, Booker T, Scott Steiner, Sting, Samoa Joe, Sharmell
Time Span: 2008-2010
Mission Statement: To command respect from the younger generation of TNA wrestlers and from fans
Impact: As the only wrestling faction to feature only former world champions, the Main Event Mafia was about as exclusive a group as there could be. Not surprisingly, the impressive resumes of each of the Mafia members proved to be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the group raked in several titles, and got some big wins against the Frontline, a rival collection of TNA originals. On the other hand, the ego-heavy group was plagued by in-fighting from Day One, particularly between MEM leader Angle and Sting, who disagreed with some of the group's tactics.
Why They Split: Following Booker T's departure from TNA in 2009, and Angle's turn to a fan favorite, the Main Event Mafia effectively dissolved.



9 THE LEGION OF DOOM

Various Members: Paul Ellering (manager), The Road Warriors, Jake Roberts, King Kong Bundy, Matt Borne, The Spoiler, The Iron Sheik
Time Span: 1983-2005
Mission Statement: To use size, power, and cunning to dominate Georgia Championship Wrestling
Impact: Although most fans think of The Legion of Doom and The Road Warriors interchangeably, The L.O.D. began as a collection of tough-as-nails bad guys who ran roughshod through Georgia Championship Wrestling in the early-1980s. Hawk, Animal, and Roberts, with Ellering as their leader, represented the core of the group, which expanded to include other notable heels. They quickly racked up the territory's TV and national tag team titles in feuds against Ronnie Garvin and the Sawyers. While cheering villains was not en vogue at the time, the devious faction was unquestionably cool.
Why They Split: The Road Warriors, with manager Ellering, joined the American Wrestling Association in 1984, leaving behind the other faction members. Hawk and Animal would reclaim the Legion of Doom name upon joining the WWF in 1990.

THE DANGEROUS ALLIANCE

8

Various Members: Paul E. Dangerously (manager), Madusa ("director of covert operations"), Rick Rude, Steve Austin, Arn Anderson, Larry Zbyszko, Bobby Eaton
Mission Statement: To use technical wrestling, and some rulebreaking, to monopolize WCW's championships
Time Span: 1991-1992
Impact: After being fired from his gig as a color commentator, Paul E. Dangerously vowed to exact his revenge against WCW by assembling some of the most athletically gifted wrestlers in the company under one banner. Right out of the gate, the group started racking up titles—with Rude winning the U.S. belt, a young Austin winning the TV belt, and veterans Anderson and Eaton winning the World tag belts. The group seemed unstoppable until losing a War Games match against a team captained by Sting at WrestleWar 92.
Why They Split: The group officially disbanded in the fall of 1992, although Madusa and Rude stuck together, as did Zbyszko and Anderson. Dangerously left WCW in a contract dispute late that year.

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7 THE NEXUS

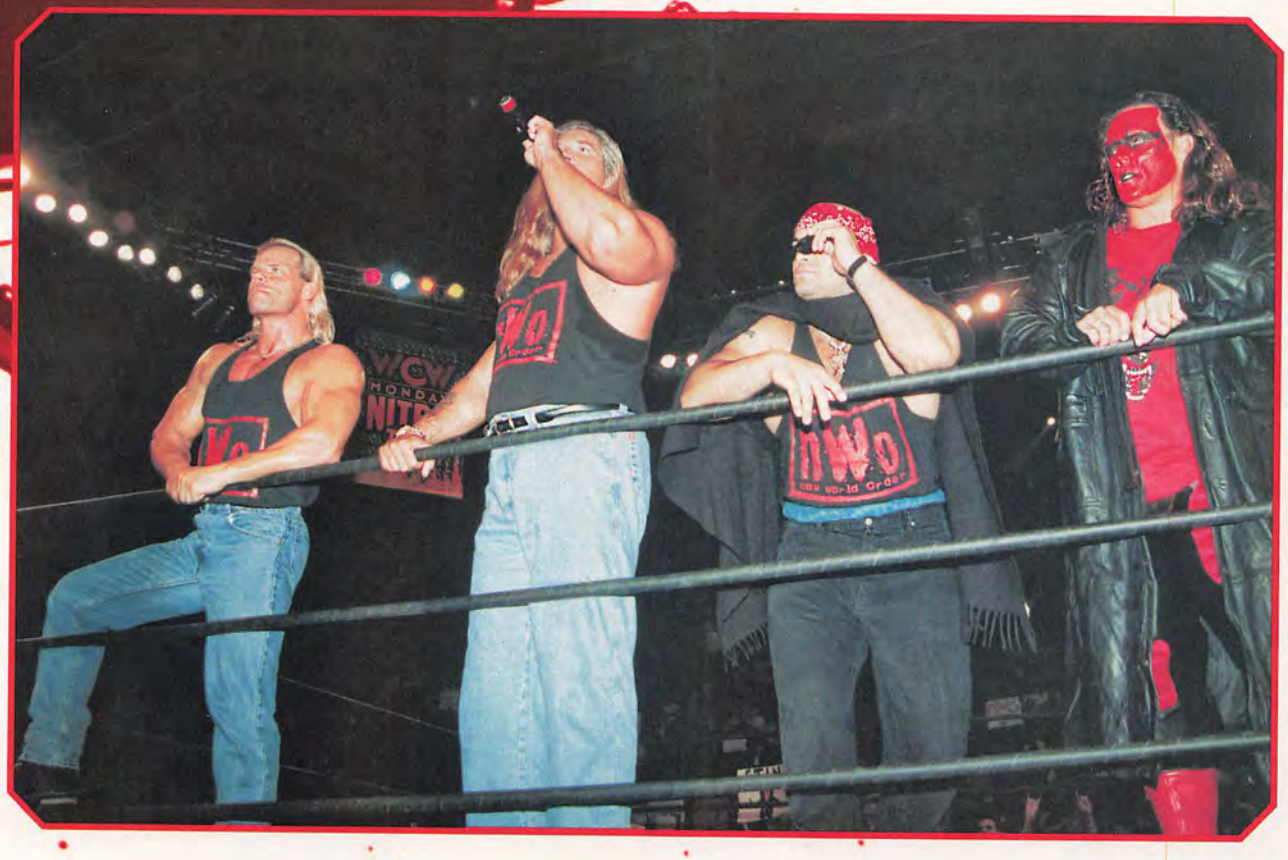
Various Members: Wade Barrett, David Otunga, Heath Slater, Justin Gabriel, John Cena, CM Punk, Skip Sheffield, Michael McGillicutty, Husky Harris, Darren Young, Michael Tarver, Mason Ryan

Mission Statement: To stick it to the WWE establishment

Time Span: 2010-present

Impact: In an era when wrestling fans thought they had seen everything, the June 2010 destruction of WWE hero John Cena and the entire *Raw* set by the bitter rookies of *NXT*'s Season One was a shocking and lasting image. With that introduction, the Barrett-led faction effectively held WWE hostage for months, using its strength in numbers to obliterate everyone from Bret Hart to Vince McMahon. Along the way, the yellow-and-black bandits even secured Cena as a member, albeit reluctantly.

Why They Split: The original Barrett-led Nexus came to an end when the group's members chose Punk as their new leader in late-2010. Barrett, Gabriel, and Slater soon reunited on the Smackdown brand as The Corre, while Punk recruited Mason Ryan as a new Nexus member.



NWO WOLFPAC 6

Various Members: Kevin Nash, Randy Savage, Lex Luger, Konan, Sting, Curt Hennig, Rick Rude, Miss Elizabeth, Buff Bagwell
Time Span: 1998-1999
Mission Statement: To promote a newer, hipper version of the New World Order
Impact: Of the seemingly countless offshoots of the original NWO, the only one that ever caught on with fans was the red-and-black branded Wolfpac. Capitalizing on the "cool" quotient of the NWO co-founder, "Big Sexy" Kevin Nash, the Wolfpac worked to embrace the cheers that the New World Order was getting anyway by separating its most popular members into their own, separate faction. As such, some of WCW's strongest fan favorites, such as Luger and Sting, were able to do the once-unthinkable—wear the NWO letters—without turning their backs on fans. The result: a fashionable faction that was "too sweet." The formation of the Wolfpac also led to the creation of the NWO B team, which was comprised of mid- and lower-card talent that wore the black and white colors of NWO Hollywood.
Why They Split: The splintered NWO factions reunited in 1999, when WCW champ Nash laid down for Hogan to give him the title. The unified group kept the "Wolfpac" moniker, but was a far cry from the cool clique that captivated fans months earlier.

5 THE HART FOUNDATION

Various Members: Bret Hart, Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith, Jim Neidhart, Brian Pillman, Danny Davis, Jimmy Hart (manager)
Time Span: 1985-1997
Mission Statement: To prove Canada's superiority over the United States
Impact: The concept was intriguing: a faction of wrestlers who were hated villains in the U.S., but beloved heroes in Canada. Under Bret Hart's leadership, that concept was executed excellently. Hart's venomous rhetoric about American wrestling fans infuriated people in the States, and appealed to those up north. More frustrating to the Foundations' detractors was how good the group's members actually were. Trained in the infamous "Hart Dungeon," the Foundation members—most of who were related—were all seasoned ring generals. The faction's memorable feud with Steve Austin helped make "Stone-Cold" a star, and culminated in The Hart Foundation's nationally celebrated victory in a five-on-five tag team bout on the 1997 Calgary Stampede pay-per-view.
Why They Split: Bret Hart left The WWF for WCW in November 1997, following the infamous Montreal Screwjob. Smith and Neidhart soon followed.

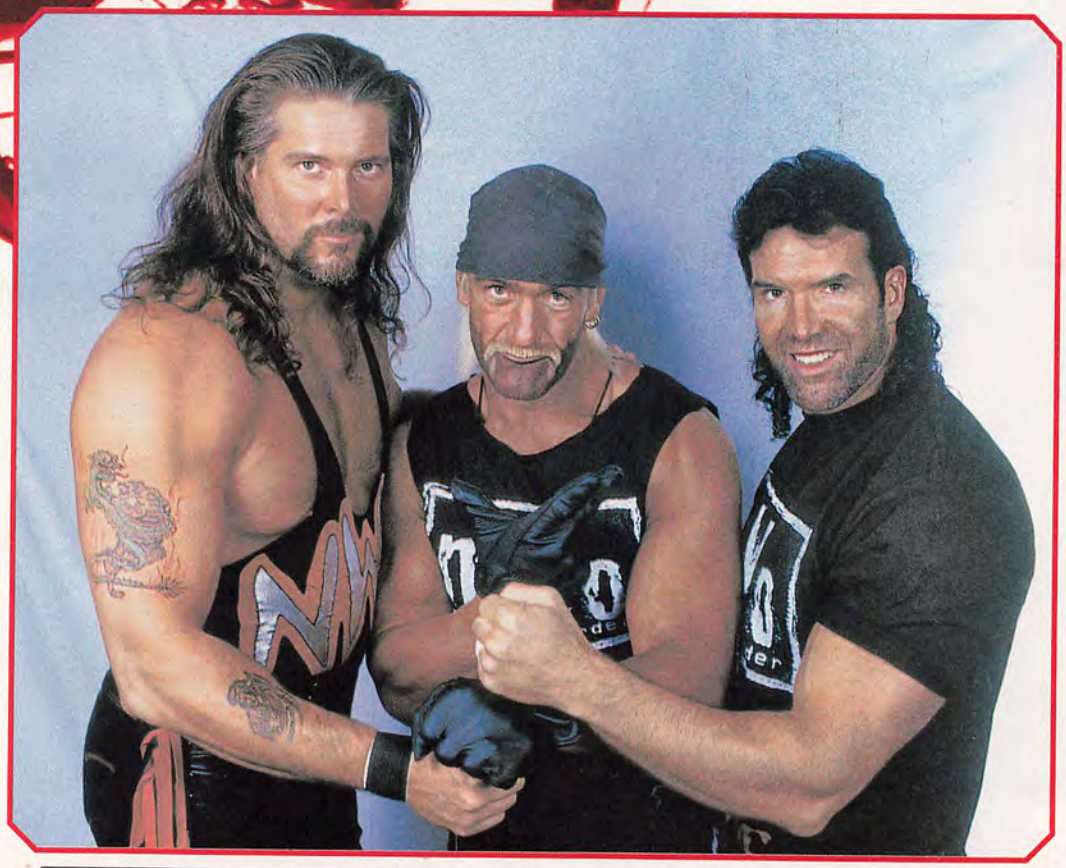
DEGENERATION-X 4

Various Members: Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, X-Pac, Chyna, New Age Outlaws, Rick Rude
Time Span: 1997-2000, 2006-2010
Mission Statement: To break the rules
Impact: Playing off of the real-life anti-authority reputations of Shawn Michaels and his Klique buddies, DeGeneration-X immediately captivated fans with their rebellious antics, which ranged from delivering promos wearing jock straps to taunting the WWF's competition outside a WCW event. Although originally conceived as villains, D-X's riotous antics eventually won over fans, who enjoyed nothing more than chopping their crotches and exclaiming two particular words. In the ring, they were as talented as they were rowdy, with Michaels, Triple-H, X-Pac and the New Age Outlaws all being repeat titleholders.
Why They Split: The group effectively dissolved when Triple-H joined forces with Stephanie McMahon and Vince McMahon in the McMahon-Helmsley Faction. Road Dogg and X-Pac briefly continued teaming together. Triple-H and Michaels reunited as a tag team with the D-X name in 2006, and remained aligned until Michaels' retirement last year.

3 EVOLUTION

Various Members: Triple-H, Ric Flair, Randy Orton, Batista
Time Span: 2003-2005
Mission Statement: To showcase the best of wrestling's past, present, and future, and to protect Triple-H's World title reign
Impact: Not since The Four Horsemen had a wrestling faction embodied the term "elite" like Evolution. The close-knit quartet featured four of the most accomplished wrestlers of the past 40 years. Sixteen-time world champ Flair played the role of the group's sage. Batista was the muscle. Orton was the young hotshot. And Triple-H was the leader, whose World title defined the group's success. But he wasn't the only one wearing gold. So dominant was Evolution that at one time all its members wore titles, having captured the World, Intercontinental, and tag team championships.
Why They Split: Threatened by Orton's singles success, Triple-H led Batista and Flair in attacking the 24-year-old the night after he won his first World title. The group remained a trio until Batista challenged Triple-H for his World title at WrestleMania 21, effectively turning his back on the group.

2 THE NEW WORLD ORDER



Various Members: Eric Bischoff (manager), Hollywood Hogan, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, Ted DiBiase Sr., The Giant, NWO Sting, Syxx, Vincent, Nick Patrick, Buff Bagwell, V.K. Wallstreet, Masahiro Chono, Big Bubba Rogers, Scott Norton, Randy Savage, Dennis Rodman, The Great Muta, Konnan, Curt Hennig, Rick Rude, Dusty Rhodes, Scott Steiner, Keiji Muto, Tenzan, Stevie Ray, Brian Adams, Ron and Don Harris

Time Span: (original version) 1996-1998. Various incarnations existed through 2002 in WWE

Mission Statement: To take over WCW

Impact: The formation of the NWO was as instrumental as anything in creating the biggest business period in wrestling history during the 1990s. Fresh off their WWF runs, Nash and Hall shocked the world by "invading" WCW in 1996. Their subsequent recruitment of Hogan made the faction the most talked-about wrestling act in a decade. For two years, the NWO absolutely dominated WCW, whose flagship program, *Monday Nitro*, typically ended with "Hollywood" Hogan and company standing over their beaten victims and spray-painting "NWO" on their backs.

Why They Split: The respective egos of Hogan and Nash eventually caused friction in the group, which inevitably fractured. Members defected into two separate NWO factions: NWO Hollywood, led by Hogan, and NWO Wolfpac, led by Nash. The feuding factions would later unite under a single banner again, but would never again be as strong.

1 THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Various Members: J.J. Dillon (manager), Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, Tully Blanchard, Ole Anderson, Barry Windham, Lex Luger, Sting, Sid Vicious, Paul Roma, Chris Benoit, Brian Pillman, Steve McMichael, Dean Malenko
Time Span: 1986-1999
Mission Statement: To keep the NWA/WCW World championship around the waist of Ric Flair.
Impact: Widely considered the blue print for the modern wrestling faction, the Horsemen consistently operated as a single unit with a unified purpose—to keep championship gold in the family, especially the World title. To that end, the Horsemen were never too far away during Flair's matches, and would routinely hit the ring to ambush his opponent at the first sign of trouble. Despite their dirty tactics, the Horsemen were always a class act—the type to stomp a poor soul using $15,000 alligator skin boots. Though they went through various changes, the "Horsemen" name always symbolized professional wrestling excellence.
Why They Split: Although various incarnations of the Horsemen popped up and folded through WCW's latter days, the faction's original, and most memorable run came to an end when core members Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard left Crockett Promotions to join The WWF in 1988.

THE 20 GREATEST WRESTLING FACTIONS OF ALL-TIME!

Section compiled by Al Castle

AS THE OLD adage goes: There's strength in numbers.

That's why, throughout the sport's history, pro wrestlers have sought to align themselves with like-minded competitors. The idea is simple enough: Four wrestlers will fair well against one wrestler. Five will do even better. And so on.

But while any collection of thugs may be able to successfully take out their target, only a select few wrestling factions have risen from the pack to become something truly special. The right formula is tough to nail down. It's not simply the size of the group, as some of the most feared factions have had memberships that could be counted on one hand. It's not the size of its members, or else you'd see The Oddities on this list, and not The Radicalz. And it's not necessarily longevity, as some of the most impactful and influential wrestling stables have lasted just a few short months.

But all of the great wrestling factions do share one common bond: unity.

From The Four Horsemen to Fortune, from the NWO to The Nexus, the sport's most dominant factions have always worked as a single unit—putting aside individual goals and egos to work toward a single goal. Working as a team can seem taboo in the individualistic sport of pro wrestling. But when in lockstep, a wrestling faction can do more than just win matches and championships. It can conquer.

And when that shared purpose is compromised, factions crumble. It's part of the reason that only two of the 20 groups listed here are still in existence.

To create this list, our editorial staff used criteria that included in-ring success, general dominance in their promotion, and influence throughout the sport.

In the interest of uniformity, we defined a wrestling faction as one that, at one time, had at least four active wrestlers in the group (disqualifying such legendary trios as The Fabulous Freebirds.) We also differentiated from a wrestling faction and a wrestling family, such as the Von Erichs and the Guerreros (although The Hart Foundation, which included several family members through marriage, is ranked.) We also considered only closely-knit groups of wrestlers who routinely worked together, rather than looser stables of wrestlers who were all represented by the same manager (such as Bobby Heenan's Heenan Family.)

Inevitably, this list will cause some debate—especially considering some of the memorable groups that did not make the cut, such as Skandar Akbar's Devastation Inc., Raven's Flock, and current-day TNA power brokers Immortal.

We encourage you to leave your feedback on this list at our blog, prowrestlingillustrated.blogspot.com. Or find *PWI* on Facebook and write on our wall.

But please don't complain about our photo selection for the special section. While our publishing company boasts the largest wrestling archive in the world, we regrettably did not have pictures that included each member of all the listed factions. We could have cheated and gone only with the groups for which we had appropriate photos, but that would defeat our own purposes for doing the section in the first place. We just had to do the best we could.

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custody of his children by beating Jeff Jarrett (he didn't). On principle, I refused to watch. Instead, I found out the refreshments inside the Impact Zone are highly overpriced. ¶Did bother to check out the clash between former Team 3-D partners Bully Ray and Brother Devon, with Devon's two untrained sons thrown into the mix, though. Credit the two former Dudleys for doing what I didn't think they could do, and that's make their feud interesting. Who knew people really could get into watching them on opposite sides. ¶Devon tried to keep his boys away, but with them in the building, you just knew bad things would find a way to happen. Sure enough, Ray jacked one of them through a table, and both ended up needing a lot of help making it to the back, one on a stretcher, after Ray won the bout. ¶Go ahead and call this disturbing—it sure as hell was—but don't feel too sorry for Devon. He put them close enough to harm's way to begin with. You reap what you sow. Kind of figured this feud would be short-lived and would set up the inevitable reunion a few months down the road. I'm not so sure now. ¶You have to wonder what this might do to their legacy, if this really is the way it's going to end between them. Disturbing yes, but intriguing, too.

ALLENTOWN, PA: If you haven't taken a trip up the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike on a cold February night to catch an indy show, you haven't lived. Well, thanks to some effective convincing from Krewda, Hicks, and Lenker (he was hoping we could stop and visit Lafayette College, one of his alma maters, in nearby Easton at night's end), Matt Brock is free to die a contented man. Add sarcasm. ¶We caught the WXWC4 show run by various folks in that ever-expanding Samoan Anoi'a family and can't say it didn't have a few moments, including my introduction to a dead ringer for WWE's Mason Ryan, which makes him a dead ringer for Batista. Not sure I understand the obsession with the Batista look in 2011, but this latest version is named Eric Cobian, the promotion's heavyweight champ. ¶Anyway, DJ Hyde won a battle royal to earn a title shot earlier on the show, but the returning Doc Daniels, who for some reason was granted officiating authority for the night, ruled it a no-decision when the original ref got waffled and both combatants set up a bunch of chairs, presumably to wield as weapons. ¶Just a thought for all small promotions out there from someone who knows: If you're going to coax fans to come out to a dumpy neighborhood in a city like Allentown on a miserable winter's night, at least give them a real ending. Meanwhile, I might put this Cobian on my radar.

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FINALLY ... THE ROCK HAS COME BACK TO WWE!

ANAHEIM, CA: I thought I'd seen the last of The Rock those long seven years ago he referred to here as he revealed himself to be the guest host of WrestleMania 27. Haven't had even a sniff of interest in catching any of his work as a would-be thespian on the big screen in the time since then, but maybe I was a bigger fan of the man than I thought I was back in the very early part of the previous decade. You just don't get many of these electric moments anymore, or maybe I'm just too jaded to notice. Or maybe the list of electrifying performers in this racket is sadly dwindling. But I'm not sure an arena can get much louder. ¶Give the man his due for still being on top of his game on the stick. I was never the biggest admirer of his work once the bell rang, but he was a winner. After the reaction he got and considering he really did look like he was loving every minute of being back in a wrestling ring, I'm thinking he might have one more big match left in him, maybe SummerSlam against John Cena, as some are speculating. That might be one Cena match I'd truly anticipate. And maybe Rock could help lift Cena to that highest level of superstardom that seems to have eluded him up to now. □

plain speaking

With Matt Brock

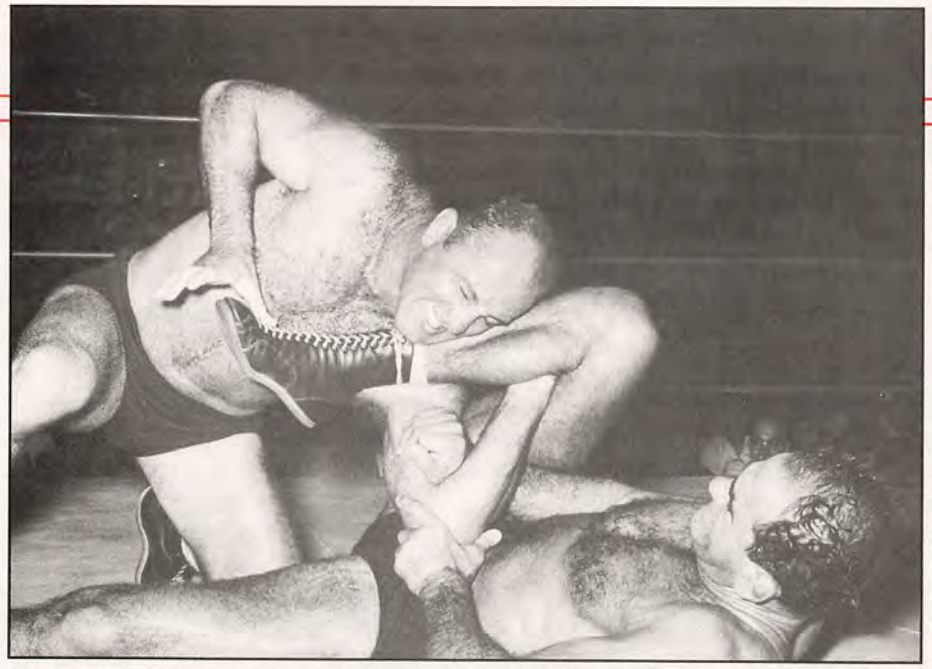
Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

NASHVILLE, TN: It's one of those feuds that's so old that nobody can really remember how it started in the first place, including even this world-weary scribe, and if you tried to take this thing too far out of this southern state, maybe not too many people would much care about it, much less revel in its rich history. But an impressive 1,500 or more showed up here at the old Tennessee Fairgrounds to watch the supposed culmination of a 30-year feud that's gone on and on and then off for a while but always ends up back on again at some point. For the who-knows-how-many-th time, Jerry "The King" Lawler squared off against "Superstar" Bill Dundee, with the grizzled Dutch Mantel refereeing. ¶You just know this feud is ancient when one guy in it has a nickname like "Superstar." Try to imagine a young buck coming up today and dragging around a moniker that generic. Anyway, these two have done battle in probably every incarnation of Memphis wrestling there has ever been. ¶Maybe you've guessed it wasn't the most athletic of matches, but damn if it wasn't special on some level, and people here would probably come out to watch it again 10 years from now. Close your eyes and it almost felt like the 1970s again. And I swear I saw some of the same faces here that I saw watching Lawler and Dundee battle back in that decade. ¶Not like it really mattered, but Lawler won with—what else—a piledriver. I wonder just how many people would believe that move was once banned in these parts. ¶Contending for the WWE title against a 30-year-old punk named The Miz one night as millions watch, getting nostalgic with the 67-year-old Dundee in this fine old dump on the weekend. Hard to tell which is more fun for the now-61-year-old "King." Actually, knowing Lawler like I have for so long, I think I know the answer. I also know this feud can't be over. Not until one of them is six feet under.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

A REAL FAMILY AFFAIR

ORLANDO, FL: Coming next month to a TNA PPV near you: a battle royal to determine who gets to marry Mickie James. I'm almost serious about that. TNA's Against All Odds this year gave us one match in which Kurt Angle could have won full



Geigel never was able to beat Lou Thesz for the NWA World title, but Thesz never had an easy time with the former amateur star. Besides, it's not like Bob's trophy shelf is exactly barren.

tory, which was one of the most successful and influential wrestling markets in the nation.

"Our wrestling program was showing all over the country," Geigel said. "We had 13 television stations airing our tapes all over the Midwest, extending from Kansas up into in Illinois and Minnesota."

In addition to establishing himself as a successful promoter, Geigel earned a reputation as a peacemaker on the NWA board of directors, arguing for promotional unity, particularly as Vince McMahon Jr. began making moves to take his upstart World Wrestling Federation national.

Upon the advice of Jim Barnett and Giant Baba, Geigel ran for president of the NWA. He was elected for three terms, serving from 1978 to 1980, 1982 to 1985, and 1986 to 1987.

In 1986, Geigel sold his territory to Jim Crockett Promotions, which was gearing up for a head-to-head war against McMahon's WWF. Geigel accepted an on-air role as president of Jim Crockett Promotions.

"I enjoyed wrestling and I enjoyed promoting, too, both sides of the business," Geigel said. "I met a lot of nice guys and had a lot of nice times."

In one memorable TV appearance, Geigel reprimanded popular Magnum TA for "conduct unbecoming of a champion." Magnum responded by attacking Geigel, who later suspended Magnum and stripped him of the U.S. title.

Geigel withdrew from the NWA in 1987 and launched a new promotion, the World Wrestling Alliance, a company that co-promoted with Giant Baba's All Japan Pro Wrestling. When that promotion failed to take off, Geigel retired from wrestling for good.

"I was getting pretty old then. It was time to get out," he said.

Today, Geigel lives with Vera, his wife of more than 60 years. The couple has five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He said he tries to stay active and enjoys his annual hunting trips. "We deer hunt every fall. It's the same group of guys every year," Geigel said. "We got some big whitetails in Wyoming. We used to get a cabin up there. An eight-point buck once walked right by the kitchen window."

Geigel doesn't follow wrestling much these days, though he admits he stops to watch from time to time. "Wrestling today, it's not really my cup of tea," he said. "I don't watch it much today because I don't know any of the guys anymore. It's not real interesting when you don't know anyone."

After all these years, he still holds resentment for the man who re-shaped the industry. "I'll tell you who killed wrestling," Geigel said. "It was Vince McMahon. He changed everything for good. I don't hold it against him. I just don't care for what it has become." □

Serving as NWA president in 1983, Geigel appears on *World Championship Wrestling* to publicly demand the return of the Georgia National title belt from Larry Zbyszko. Had Larry just cheated to win the belt, Geigel would have let it slide. But he bought the belt from Killer Tim Brooks for $25,000!

whatever happened to...

By Dan Murphy

BOB GEIGEL

EVEN AT THE age of 86, Bob Geigel is still keeping the peace and laying down the law.

The former National Wrestling Alliance president is keeping busy working two nights a week as a security guard at The Woodlands race track in Kansas City. The track closed in 2008, but Geigel walks the beat to ward off trespassers and vandals. When he's not patrolling the track, Geigel still enjoys deer hunting and staying in touch with his wrestling friends through the Cauliflower Alley Club, which awarded him the prestigious Art Abrams Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007.

"I try to get out to the Cauliflower Alley reunions whenever I can. I don't miss many," Geigel said in a recent phone interview. "There's maybe 600 or 700 guys who go, and I know most of them. It's always nice seeing the familiar faces."

Geigel was born in Iowa and served in the Navy during World War II, spending two years in active combat in the Pacific Theater. When the war ended, Geigel enrolled at the University of Iowa, where he played football and wrestled for the powerhouse Hawkeyes. In 1948, he placed third in the NCAA national wrestling tournament in the 191-pound weight class, finishing behind Verne Gagne and Charles Gottfried. After graduating from Iowa with a degree in physical education, Geigel was convinced to try his hand at professional wrestling by boxer/wrestler/restaurateur Alphonse "Babe" Bisignano. His first exposure to pro grappling came much earlier.

"Frank Gotch, the World champion, used to train in Renwick, Iowa, about 15 or 16 miles from where I grew up. My dad and I used to take a horse and buggy and go out to watch him train," Geigel said.

Geigel made his pro debut in 1950 in the central states region. Despite being born and raised in Iowa, he adopted the name "Texas" Bob Geigel and became a successful heel during the early-1950s. He competed throughout the Midwest and had successful tours of the Amarillo territory (where he competed under a mask as "A-Bomber"), Columbus, Ohio, and New York. Along the way, he captured the NWA Central States heavyweight championship six times, winning that title for the first time in 1958 and for a final time in 1971.

Geigel won the AWA World tag team title with three partners, Hard Boiled Haggarty, Otto Von Krupp, and Stan Kowalski. He also won the NWA Central States tag team title with Pat O'Connor and the NWA Southwest tag team title with Dory Funk Jr. His steadiest partner was "Bulldog" Bob Brown, with whom he captured the Central States version of the NWA North American tag team title five times.

In 1963, Geigel decided to try his hand at promoting, partnering with O'Connor, Gust Karras, and George Simpson. The group found success in Kansas City, and Geigel eventually partnered with Harley Race to buy out Sam Muchnick's St. Louis terri-

Photo by Joyce Paustian

Bob Geigel is presented with the Art Abrams Lifetime Achievement Award, named for the co-founder of the Cauliflower Alley Club, in 2007.

BETH PHOENIX 359

Photo by George Napolitano

capsule profile 359 BETH PHOENIX

BORN IN ELMIRA, New York, on November 24, 1980 ... At age 11, won a coloring contest with the prize being tickets to a WWF television taping ... Credits the experience as sparking her interest in becoming a wrestler ... Early favorites included Owen Hart and Ted DiBiase Sr. ... Attended New York Notre Dame High School in Elmira, where she became the first female varsity wrestler in the school's history ... Won the Northeast freestyle women's championship (158-pound weight class) in 1999 ... Later that year, won the women's championship in the same weight class at the New York State Fair Tournament ... Attended Canisius College in Buffalo, where she earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice ... While in college, began pro wrestling training under the tutelage of the All Knighters—Joey Knight and Robin Knightwing—previous graduates of the infamous Hart Dungeon in Calgary, Alberta ... Made pro debut against Alexis Laree (Mickie James) ... Competed in various independent promotions including Cleveland All Pro Wrestling and Apocalypse Wresting under the name Phoenix ... Moved to Far North Wrestling, where she defeated Joey Knight and Kevin Grace for the promotion's cruiserweight title in 2003 ... Lost to April Hunter in the final of World Xtreme Wrestling's annual Women's Elite-8 tournament ... Competed at the inaugural tapings for SHIMMER Women Athletes, losing to Allison Danger and scoring an upset win over NWA Midwest Women's champion MsChif in a non-title match ... Impressed in a WWE tryout in May 2004 ... Relocated to Louisville, Kentucky, to begin training in Ohio Valley Wrestling ... Signed developmental contract with WWE in October 2005 ... Made OVW TV debut the following month, using the name Beth Phoenix ... Served as manager for Aaron "The Idol" Stevens ... Made WWE debut on *Raw* in May, saving Trish Stratus from an attack by Mickie James ... Repeatedly fended off James while forming a friendship with Stratus ... Suffered a fractured mandible during a match against Victoria ... Had a titanium plate and nine screws inserted into her jaw ... Was out of action only two months ... Unsuccessfully challenged OVW Women's champion ODB, but eventually took the strap from Serena ... Lost title in a gauntlet match after being eliminated by Lea, who went on to win the belt ... Returned to WWE with a more aggressive demeanor and disdain for the fans ... Size and power-based style earned her the nickname "The Glamazon" ... Defeated Candice Michelle to capture first WWE Women's championship at No Mercy ... Retained title in two-out-of-three-falls rematch on *Raw*, breaking Michelle's clavicle in the process ... Teamed with Melina to defeat Ashley and Maria at WrestleMania XXIV ... Dropped the Women's title to James ... After falling out with Melina, defeated her former partner in an "I Quit" match at One Night Stand ... Answered an open challenge issued by Santino Marella, defeating him via roll-up ... After sharing a surprise kiss, the two became an unlikely couple soon dubbed "Glamarella" ... Duo defeated Kofi Kingston and Mickie James at SummerSlam, earning her the Women's title and Marella the Intercontinental championship ... Won Slammy Award for 2008 Diva of the Year ... Lost title to Melina at Royal Rumble ... Eventually split with Marella after tiring of his masquerading as his "sister" Santina ... Narrowly defeated by James in first shot at the WWE Divas title ... Moved over to Smackdown in a trade ... Became only the second woman to compete in the Royal Rumble, in 2010 ... Eliminated Great Khali in a shocking moment, but was eventually tossed by CM Punk ... Again became a fan favorite, aligning with Tiffany during her feud against Vickie Guerrero and Lay-Cool ... Defeated Michelle McCool in an "Extreme Makeover" match at Extreme Rules to win her third Women's title ... Tore ACL in a match against Rosa Mendez ... Was forced to defend title in handicap match against Lay-Cool the following week, which saw her get pinned by Layla ... Returned at Survivor Series and attacked Lay-Cool after they lost the Divas title to Natalya ... Teamed with Natalya to defeat Lay-Cool in the first ever Diva's tag team table match at TLC.

Photo by George Napolitano

Beth Phoenix bounced back from her knee injury stronger than ever, as evidenced by this fireman's carry on *both* members of Lay-Cool at Survivor Series.

Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.

Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.

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Holiday 1998 (Special Issue): Kane: Still Haunted By His Day Of Glory. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Stevie Ray, Val Venis, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards, bonus calendar.

Jan. 1999: Seasons Greetings With A Bang (DDP & Kimberly). Also: Severn-Shamrock, Konnan, Arn, Undertaker-Kane, Chris Jericho.

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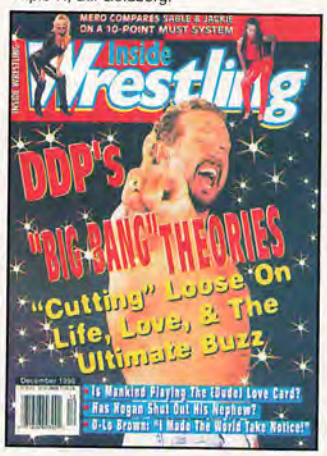

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the top Divas), he probably won't go away completely.

And why do I get the feeling, based on nothing really, that Mick Foley, who recently commented that he realizes the end is very near for him as even a part-time wrestler, should have a final victory lap in WWE (and Hall of Fame induction) coming to him? I hope he does, because he, too, made a gigantic contribution to the Attitude Era, and his latest run in TNA, which even included a surprising reign as TNA World champ, has underwhelmed me.

Austin. Rock. Foley. Undertaker. Triple-H. Michaels. Stratus. Along with Foley and Vince McMahon, they, more than any other stars, exemplified what WWE Attitude was all about, and all in different ways. Even a man I would consider a second-tier star of the Attitude Era, Edge, recently told the crowd that turned out for a house show in his hometown of Toronto that he probably won't wrestle many more times in that city. So now it really, truly, honestly, sincerely, genuinely, and finally feels like we are moving on. And I really must be getting old.

WWE clearly has realized this as well, having made a stronger effort to create new stars in the past year than it has in a long time.

The Miz ... Sheamus ... John Morrison ... Alberto Del Rio ... Wade Barrett ... Kofi Kingston.

Hell, they along with today's biggest star in his prime, Cena, and Randy Orton might have to start not just playing big roles, but *carrying* WrestleManias beginning in 2012. They may have to contribute to that special aura that surrounds the show of shows, the way Bret Hart did last year and Rock did this year. Sooner rather than later, WWE may look to them to start elevating some of the even younger talent—the Mason Ryans, Alex Rileys, Seth Rollins, or whoever might step to the head of the next class—in the biggest company in the biggest matches on the biggest shows.

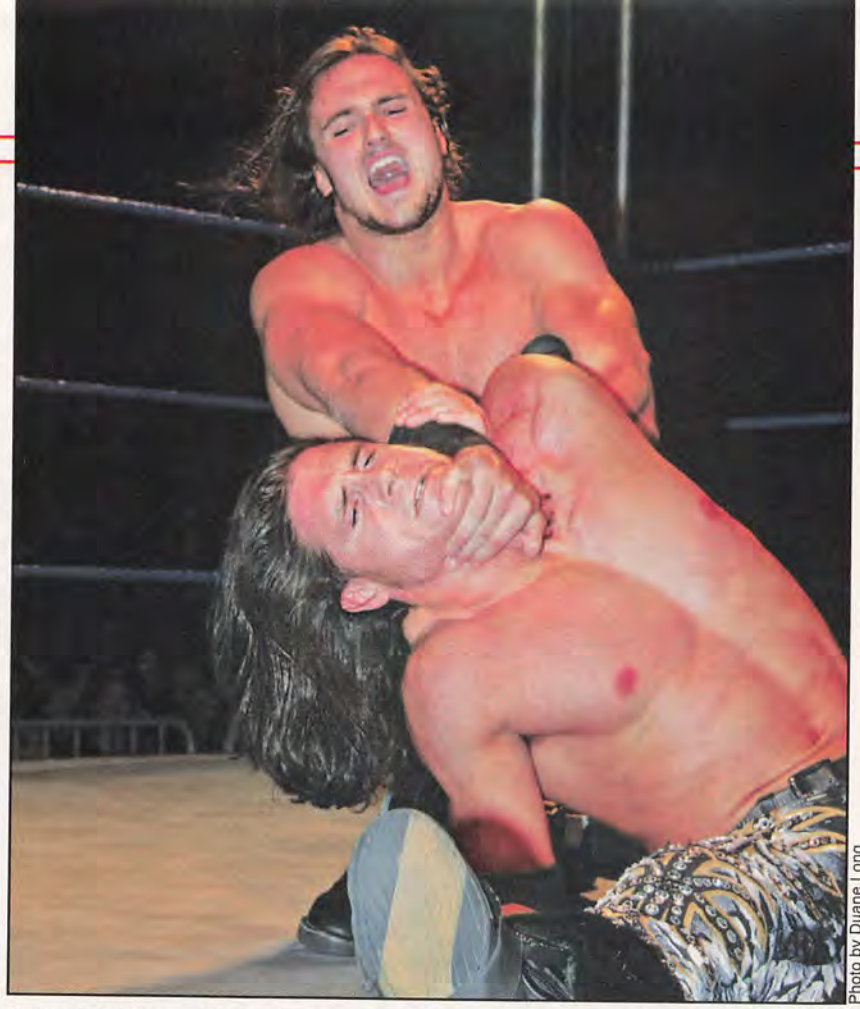

Photo by Duane Long

Drew McIntyre and John Morrison are just two of the younger wrestlers Lenker feels will have to step up big in 2012 and beyond in order for WrestleMania to have that "big-show" feel.

Are we all ready for that?

There's absolutely no way of knowing, but I can't help but wonder what we will think of some of those names (Miz, Sheamus, etc.) when we take a look back 10 to 15 years from now. Will we do so fondly and nostalgically, or with indifference? Fifteen years ago today, the Attitude Era was in its infancy. Austin was just starting to break out. The Rock was still Flex Kavana (not even yet Rocky Maivia), the young buck son of Rocky Johnson who was toiling with the likes of Jerry Lawler, Bart Sawyer, and Brian Christopher to the appreciation of hundreds of fans in the USWA (and maybe those who read the fine print in *PWI's* "Arena Reports"). Foley was a middle-of-the-card journeyman with a nice fan following as Mankind who didn't appear to have an iconic upside. 'Taker was 'Taker, and yeah, Michaels was Michaels. But Triple-H was just the annoying and very average aristocrat with the big nose, and Trish Stratus was just another really hot coed at York University in her native Canada.

What does that tell us? Well, not a whole lot really. Maybe just that we shouldn't make a whole lot of assumptions about the talent that has been moving up of late. If you're not impressed, at least give it some time before passing judgment.

I can't wait to look back. □

on the road

With Dave Lenker

WHAT AN ODD time it was for me to start waxing nostalgic. It happened as I watched The Undertaker and Triple-H cut very intense promos on each other to unofficially book and sign their match for WrestleMania 27 without uttering a single syllable between them.

Some (including me) liked it a lot, some didn't, but even if you didn't much care for it, give WWE and the two men involved credit for trying something different. Anyway, during the nose-to-nose stare down, I got to thinking about the first WrestleMania match between the two, which happened exactly 10 WrestleManias earlier (WrestleMania X-7). Here comes the odd part. That match didn't do a whole lot for me. I remember it having good intensity and some good spots, but it was very methodically based and more solid than spectacular. 'Taker was about to take a much-needed vacation from the depressing dark side and and embrace his "American Badass" biker persona at the time, Triple-H was ultra-serious and sledgehammer-obsessed, and it was—at best—a good match, just not one that you'd rush to watch again.

But as the "Dead Man" and "The Game" steered their way onto their personal roads to WrestleMania 27, it suddenly hit me that something much bigger really feels like it's coming to an end: the Attitude Era. All right, the Attitude Era has long since been replaced by the oftentimes-milquetoast, sanitized, PG version of WWE. But now, it seems, the true stars of that era are fading before our eyes—perhaps all more or less coming together one last time: The Rock as guest host of WrestleMania. "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and Trish Stratus serving as coaches on the returning *Tough Enough*. The aging Undertaker, weakened by injury after injury these days and very possibly retiring "The Streak" against the heir apparent to the McMahon throne, himself injury-prone, north of age 40, and taking on an office job that will no doubt eat up more and more of his time, energy, and focus. And, of course, don't forget the induction of Shawn Michaels into the WWE Hall of Fame.

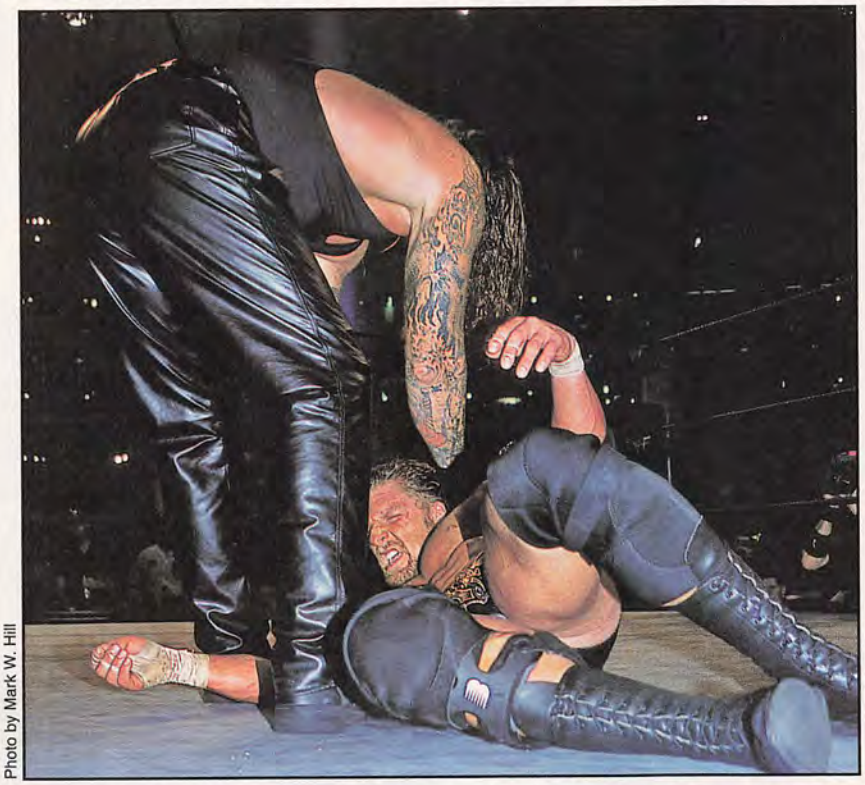

Photo by Mark W. Hill

A recent confrontation between Triple-H and The Undertaker on *Raw*, made Dave Lenker feel somewhat nostalgic—not for their WM X-7 match (pictured)—but for the WWF Attitude Era. Many stars from those days were represented at WrestleMania 27.

HBK sounds very sincere in insisting that he did, indeed, wrestle his final match last year at WrestleMania. Yeah, I know, Michaels missed four years during the heart of the Attitude Era, but he was integral to the first part of it and a huge (but changed) star as the era began to draw to a close.

This isn't to say the biggest of stars of what I see as the greatest era in WWE history will be gone from WWE forever come, say, the start of the summer. Rock has vowed not to leave again, and maybe he does have a match with John Cena in him. Michaels says he won't wrestle again but remains WWE forever. Triple-H clearly is in this for the long, long haul, whether or not his career as a full-time wrestler is drawing to an end. And with Undertaker having logged, incredibly, more than two full consecutive decades with the company (and his new bride, Michelle McCool, one of

data sheet

DOLPH ZIGGLER

HEIGHT: 6'
WEIGHT: 223
HOMETOWN: Hollywood, Florida
GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: January 30, 2011—Even though he did not actually win the title on this night, Dolph Ziggler opened a lot of eyes to his potential when he wrestled World champion Edge at the Royal Rumble PPV. Ziggler came within half a second of taking the World title on several occasions. Up until that point, he had largely been perceived as a solid mid-card wrestler who probably would peak at a few Intercontinental title reigns. On this night, he seemed on the cusp of jumping up to that next tier in WWE for the first time.
HE DOES IT SO WELL: Ziggler does not get enough credit for the time that he puts in at the gym. His dedication shows in his physique and—more importantly—his cardiovascular conditioning. In Ziggler, WWE has a superior athlete who is capable of wrestling a 45-minute match without getting fatigued. He is a throwback to a different era in wrestling, a time when wrestlers were less concerned with squeezing all of their moves into a short match before the next commercial break. This will prove very beneficial when he starts to consistently wrestle in main events.
WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: In spite of his ability to excel in longer matches, most of Ziggler's losses come in matches that span four minutes or less, as has been the case with recent Smackdown outings against Edge and Kofi Kingston. Whether this is an issue of focus or simply a case of other wrestlers knowing they have to take advantage of him early, Ziggler needs to show up ready to go from the opening bell.
PET FINISHER: Zig Zag reverse bulldog, sleeper, jumping Russian legsweep
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Late last year on *Raw*, Ziggler suffered a short, humiliating submission loss to John Cena. While there is certainly no shame in losing to a star of Cena's caliber, some wondered how he'd handle such a sound defeat. Would he run back to Smackdown to face challenges from men he knew he could beat? Or would this loss serve as motivation to improve for a future rematch?
OUTLOOK: As long as Vickie Guerrero is by his side, Ziggler should remain close to WWE's upper-card scene for the foreseeable future. Whether or not he can parlay this success into a World title reign will depend on a combination of his own determination and catching the right breaks. Certainly, he has to be considered a top contender as long as he can stay with the less top-heavy Smackdown brand.
QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "When we wrestled for the Intercontinental title back in 2009, I could tell that Ziggler had the determination to succeed, the talent to excel, and the drive to follow through. All Dolph was lacking at the time was the experience to put all of it together. I think he's finally starting to get there now."

—Rey Mysterio Jr.

Photo by Steve Beyer

data sheet

DOUGLAS WILLIAMS

HEIGHT: 6'
WEIGHT: 235
HOMETOWN: Reading, Berkshire, England
GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: December 5, 2010—Douglas Williams upset AJ Styles, pinning his former Fortune comrade cleanly in the middle of the ring at the TNA Final Resolution event in Orlando to win the TV title. In spite of Styles' reputation as one of the best wrestlers in the world, Williams overwhelmed him early, even bouncing him off the guardrail into a Rolling Chaos Theory outside the ring. Back inside, he used Styles' own repertoire against him, nailing AJ with a Styles Clash to take the match and the championship.
HE DOES IT SO WELL: In terms of technical efficiency inside the ring, few are more polished than Williams. With a style very reminiscent of a younger William Regal, Williams combines a hard-nose, aggressive European manner with a strong technical, mat-based game and the ability to take to the air with diving kneebombs, as well as a Tornado DDT that puts Sir William's to shame.
WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: As younger wrestlers continue to join TNA, Williams could find himself overwhelmed with the high-risk X style pioneered by competitors such as Styles, Christopher Daniels, and Kazarian. With a small fear of heights no doubt playing a part, Williams' strategy has often involved grounding some of his faster opponents and wearing them down on the mat as almost nobody in TNA can.
PET FINISHERS: Rolling Chaos Theory German suplex, Bombs Away diving kneedrop
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: As a member of The British Invasion with Brutus Magnus in 2009, Williams had a difficult time with the hardcore style of Team 3-D during their series of matches. Even though Williams and Magnus would briefly steal 3-D's New Japan Pro Wrestling IWGP tag title by defeating them in a tables match on *Impact*, this win was more of a concerted effort by the other members of Eric Young's World Elite than any dazzling feat of tag wrestling. Ultimately, Team 3-D would overpower Williams and Magnus to win the title back at Bound for Glory.
OUTLOOK: Should TNA choose to bolster its X division to make it more competitive—as has been rumored—then former X champion Williams could be in for even stiffer competition. But Williams' style is different than most wrestlers in the division, and he uses that to his advantage. Look for Williams to reclaim the X title at some point this year and hold it for a significant length of time.
QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I've known Doug a long time, both in Ring of Honor and here in TNA. This chap is one of the most underrated wrestlers in the world. He can beat anybody. Just ask Samoa Joe. Or better yet, ask AJ Styles. I would love nothing more than to see Doug get a lengthy run at the top of TNA, because I know he can beat wrestlers like Jeff Hardy, Ken Anderson, and RVD."

—Desmond Wolfe

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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company. His well-publicized problems with **Rick Santel**, who is citing "unsafe working conditions" in a lawsuit against SAW, and manager **Paul Adams**, who is suing for wrongful termination, were also factors.

George Gulas, the son of legendary Tennessee promoter **Nick Gulas**, will be taking over Riggins' booking duties. Riggins credits George's father as giving him his start in pro wrestling.

Tully Blanchard is making a few rumblings on the indy scene as of late. As of press time, he is scheduled to appear at the Funking Conservatory in Orlando, Florida, both as a special referee for a match between Women's champion **Claudia Reiff** and challenger **Radiant Rain**, and as the cornerman for **Dory Funk Jr.** and **Johnny Magnum** when they face **Fushicho Masuku** and **Arachna Man**. Both matches can be seen on *Bang! TV* at dory-funk.com.

News from the East Coast Wrestling Association: Longtime ECWA star **Glen Osbourne** is stepping away from the spotlight once again, citing the need to heal injuries that he has accumulated over his two-decade career ... Osbourne's faction, **Revolution**, continues its war with heavyweight champion **Mega**, who now has the returning **Cha Cha Chance** as an ally ... The new relationship between the ECWA and the Tri-State Wrestling Alliance is working out great for fans of both promotions, with the ECWA's heralded Super 8 tournament taking place at a frequent TWA venue, the Flyers Skate Zone in Voorhees, New Jersey, on April 30.

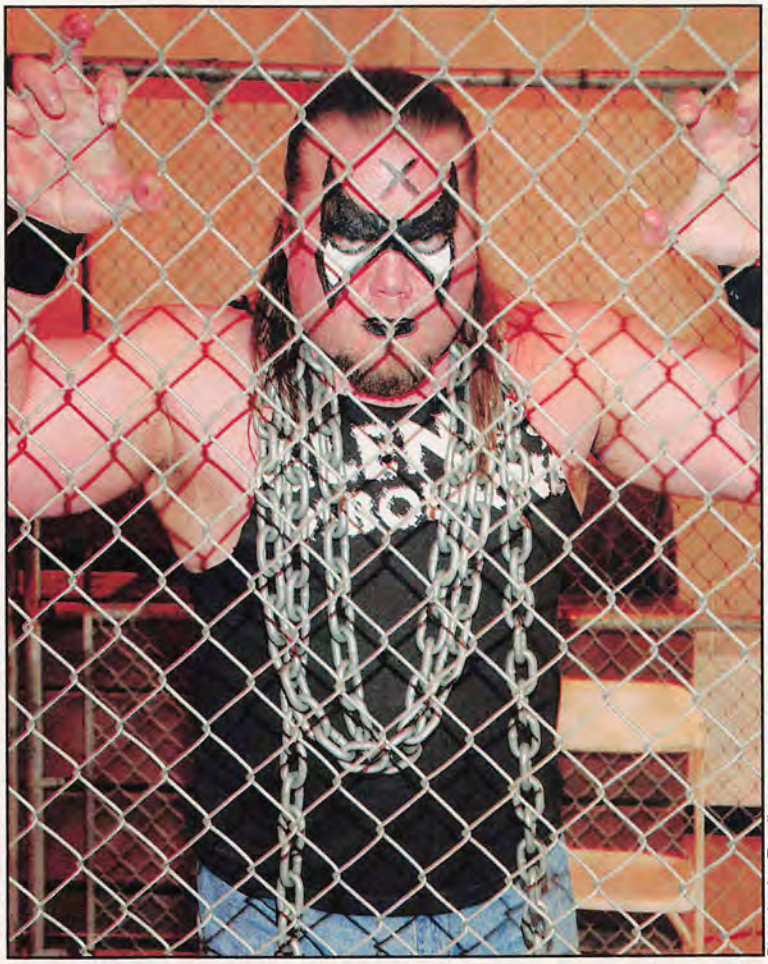

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Osbourne is taking a much-need rest

Speaking of the TWA, the promotion held its second annual event to raise funds to fight autism. The show received considerable attention on television and in newspapers in the Philadelphia-New Jersey area. TWA champion **Breaker Morant** defeated **"Beautiful" Bobby Shields** in the lumberjack main event. Congratulations to everyone involved in that great cause.

This 'n' that: **Isis the Amazon**, better known as **Aloisia** in *NXT*, reportedly had a lackluster tryout match for TNA—but her 6'9" size still makes it a strong possibility that she will be utilized in some capacity ... **Desmond Wolfe** is on leave due to undisclosed medical reasons ... **Shawn Michaels**, who was retired by The Undertaker at WrestleMania 26, reiterated that he will never wrestle again in an interview with the *Amarillo Globe-News* ... **Linda McMahon** told the *Greenwich Times* that she's leaning toward running for **Joe Lieberman's** vacant U.S. Senate seat in 2012 and that she has no plans to return to WWE ... Miss USA **Rima Fakih**, who has already made two appearances on WWE programming, is the first contestant revealed for the new season of *Tough Enough* ... **Montel Vontavious Porter** wrestled in his first match for New Japan, teaming with **Taichi** to defeat **Tomoaki Honma** and **Togi Makabe** after 12 minutes of action.

From the Original Fruity Pebbles Dept.: **Hulk Hogan** criticized Vince McMahon's creative philosophy during a recent interview with **Peter Rosenberg** on New York's Hot 97. He used **The Rock's** on-air diatribe against John Cena as a prime example. "All of a sudden, in three or four seconds, he had the whole arena screaming that Cena sucks. Sometimes I just don't understand the philosophy, because John Cena is going to be there all the time. And even though The Rock said he was back, he was only back for one day. He isn't going to be there wrestling every single week like John Cena is, you know, holding it down and keeping it real ... I just didn't understand why they wanted to destroy Cena so quickly."

Maybe "The Hulkster" sees a few parallels between his superhero push and that of Cena's in recent years. And maybe he's still smarting from The Rock's barbs back in 2002.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

At least for this moment Karen's not yapping!

sion charges on February 16, but the date was postponed until late-March because his lawyer was unavailable. Prosecutors expect Hardy to plead guilty to at least one felony and misdemeanor charge in return for a lighter sentence. Apparently, Hardy and the TNA powers-that-be don't think the "Charismatic Enigma" will receive much—if any—jail time.

The all-too-real storyline involving **Jeff Jarrett**, his new wife **Karen Jarrett**, and **Kurt Angle** continued with a grudge match between Jarrett and Angle at Against All Odds. It seemed as if Angle and the referee were literally exhausted by Karen's constant interference. A distracted Angle attempted a sunset flip on Jarrett, who merely sat down mid-move for the three-count. And, of course, Jeff and Karen sneered condescendingly at Kurt as they lingered on the ramp after the match.

In other bouts at Against All Odds, **Bully Ray** beat **Brother Devon** in a streetfight ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** beat **Mickie James** ... **Samoa Joe** made **D'Angelo Dinero** tap out ... **Beer Money** & **Scott Steiner** defeated **Rob Terry**, **Gunner**, & **Murphy** ... X division champion **Kazarian** defeated **Robbie E**.

Austin Aries is grappling with a decision that has agonized many talented independent wrestlers as they reach their 30s. Should he stay or should he go? Aries is pretty down on the wrestling business after failing to make the cut for *Tough Enough*. He was dropped from Ring of Honor in September as that promotion continued to make budget cuts. It's getting to the point that Aries has to decide if he wants to continue to be a full-time wrestler.

"Apparently I'm not big, young, or tough enough," said a dejected Aries via Twitter. "While it's been amazing, the AA chapter of my life may be coming to an end soon." Let's hope that is not the case, but my best wishes are with Aries no matter what he decides.

I was sorry to hear that **Reno Riggins** will be relinquishing his position as matchmaker for Showtime All-Star Wrestling. Riggins said that the recent theft of $20,000 worth of camera and television equipment, as well as the loss of several episodes of SAW before they made it to air, has taken a toll on everyone in the

NEWS ANALYSIS

MULTI-TALENTED JERICHO. Chris Jericho has talents that go well beyond pro wrestling, and we first caught glimpses of this when he teamed with his old sidekick, Ralphus, in WCW. No, I don't see a blockbuster movie career in Jericho's future, but his ease in front of the camera and his natural gift of gab make me believe that he would be an excellent talk-show host. With Regis retiring, how about *Live With Chris & Kelly*?

CHRISTIAN'S CAREER BORN AGAIN. The fans reacted so positively to Christian's run-in at Elimination Chamber not so much because he was making his WWE return, but at the prospect of an Edge-Christian reunion. How about a TLC match pitting Edge and Christian against Alberto Del Rio and, say, Wade Barrett at SummerSlam? And how about Jim Ross to call the action? Now I know I'm dreaming.

THE JEFF HARDY DILEMMA. While I hesitate to say that Jeff Hardy didn't deserve to hold the TNA World title solely because of his ongoing legal problems, I will say that I am much more comfortable seeing a longtime "hero" like Sting in that role. *(For more on Sting's return and title victory, flip the magazine to "What's Happening" on page 10 of* The Wrestler*).*

AUSTIN ARIES IS NOT ALONE. As a selfish fan, I don't want Aries to retire, but I would understand his decision if he chose another career path. I felt the same emotions when former ROH standout John Walters quit the business in 2006. Although Walters has never returned full-time, he recently enjoyed a stint on *Lucha Libre USA*. Aries could find a way to balance his passion with whatever new career path he might choose.

HBK IS A MAN OF HIS WORD. "The only way a 185-pound guy made it in that business is to do something nobody else ever did," Shawn Michaels told the *Amarillo Globe-News*. "The best thing I can do is stay retired, because nobody ever stays retired." Countless wrestlers have claimed to retire, only to return within a year. Michaels is the only wrestler whom I have actually believed ... for now.

the game show *Downfall*, on the same network last year, and also appeared on the short-lived *Celebrity Duets* on Fox, is a natural for the program.

Christian made his long-awaited return to WWE, coming to the aid of longtime friend and partner **Edge** at the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view. Edge was celebrating his successful World heavyweight title defense in the Chamber when **Alberto Del Rio**—his scheduled opponent for WrestleMania 27—attacked the "Rated R Superstar" and clamped on his trademark cross-armbar. Christian had been sidelined by Del Rio's armbar six months earlier, so he rushed into the ring and gave Del Rio a mighty thrashing.

"Captain Charisma," who had undergone the first surgery of his career to repair his torn pectoral muscle, shared his thoughts with **Joey Styles** on wwe.com. "I'm not going to lie," he said. "It was the hardest thing I've had to overcome in my entire professional career. There were days I wondered if I'd ever be able to compete again." Christian added that the reaction of his "peeps" at the Elimination Chamber event in Oakland, California, made all the difficult physical therapy worthwhile.

Christian wasn't the only longtime WWE superstar to re-emerge at the Elimination Chamber, just in time for WrestleMania. **Booker T** and **Trish Stratus** were on the scene to promote the return of *Tough Enough*, where they will serve as trainers. Booker sat in for some color commentary while Trish mixed it up with **Michelle McCool** and **Layla** when she saved **Kelly Kelly** from a LayCool ambush. Stratus' return to WWE garnered some attention on *Sports Illustrated's* website, which highlighted her as the "Lovely Lady Of The Day."

Here are the full results from the Elimination Chamber PPV: **John Cena** beat **John Morrison**, **Randy Orton**, **CM Punk**, **R-Truth**, and **Sheamus** in the Elimination Chamber ... WWE champion The Miz defeated **Jerry Lawler** ... **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** beat **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** for the WWE World tag team title ... World heavyweight champion Edge defeated **Wade Barrett**, **The Big Show**, **Kane**, **Drew McIntyre**, and **Rey Mysterio Jr.** in the Elimination Chamber ... Alberto Del Rio forced **Kofi Kingston** into submission.

And Trish Stratus wasn't the only Diva making news. Thanks to Twitter, we're now privy to the tragedies and joys of all celebrities, and that includes the women of wrestling. **Candice Michelle** revealed some very sad news, stating, "I always love posting positive things, as that's the focus of my life. However, life brings about unexpected things, and, I feel being a public figure, it's my duty to share. On Sunday, I suffered a miscarriage. I have both physically and mentally been through a lot of trauma."

Our prayers go out to Candice Michelle in this very difficult circumstance. On the flip side, **Jillian Hall** revealed that she is expecting. "It's time to announce what I have been asked repeatedly lately. Yes, I am pregnant."

This will be Jillian's second child. She already has an 11-year-old daughter. And, if anyone hears Jillian singing lullabies to this baby, *please* call Child Protective Services!

Jeff Hardy pulled off an upset of sorts when he regained the TNA World title (be it ever-so-briefly) from **Mr. Anderson** on February 13 in a ladder match at Against All Odds. Why an upset? Because Hardy's legal future remains uncertain, which was most likely a reason why he dropped the belt to Anderson in the first place. Hardy was scheduled to face drug posses-

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Trish & Booker will be *"Tough"* trainers

Christian gives us hope of a long-awaited reunion

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names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

PERHAPS IT'S THE definition of star-power. **Chris Jericho** makes just as many headlines away from pro wrestling as when he's in the hunt for the WWE World title. Jericho left WWE in October and embarked on a major publicity tour for his second autobiography, *Undisputed*, the second chapter of which was printed in the last issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING*. Since that time, he has done interviews with *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, in addition to countless mainstream publications and television and radio shows.

Jericho says he left WWE at the end of his contract because of tour dates with his rock band, **Fozzy**, and the impending release of his book. He adds that WWE had made a renewal offer last September and that it's likely he'll resume his wrestling career sometime in the future. But here are a few tidbits of interest from a couple of recent radio interviews. The first two are from Hot 97 in New York and the third is from 100.7 FM in Boston:

On **Michael Cole**: "He's doing a good job as a heel, but it's hard to hear him going back and forth. There's no commitment. There's no credibility."

On **The Miz**: "When I first won the undisputed title in '03, Vince booked me the same way. I was always losing or squeaking out with roll-ups ... It doesn't really work. People need to believe you're a badass."

On **Vince McMahon**: "It didn't start good. Over the years, there were ups and downs. Here we are in 2011 and I was just texting Vince this morning. We have laughs about things that have nothing to do with wrestling. We have deep respect for each other, but it took a long time to get to that point."

Jericho conceded that it was difficult to be away from WWE during so much WrestleMania hype. But it turns out, at least according to *USA Today*, that Jericho might be stealing his own share of the spotlight at 'Mania time. It was recently announced that Jericho will be among the contestants for the next season of ABC's *Dancing With The Stars*. Jericho, who hosted

Jericho's a natural on TV

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Photo by George Napolitano

The skills of Santino Marella (tossing Justin Gabriel) are not compromised by his desire to make people laugh, at least in the opinion of Penny Betrolle, who takes issue with a story that appeared in Volume 38.

ing to watch this no-nonsense man go about his business. Each time you heard his music hit, you knew you were in for a great display of raw talent. While that may still be true, the storyline that follows him really takes away from what he brings to the table.

Some of what I'm saying may be aimed more toward Michael Cole and his unjustified hatred for Bryan, but this whole image of Bryan as nerd is ridiculous. He's just a man who is dedicated to his craft. Is there anything wrong with that?

JASON LEWIS
Buffalo, NY

OUR BAD!

I was reading your "Editors' Roundtable" about The Undertaker's winning streak at WrestleMania, and any argument against the streak being broken due to injury seems null and void. 'Taker missed both WrestleMania X and XVI, and "The Streak" has continued.

Therefore, if (and that's a big if) The Undertaker does not show up at WrestleMania 27, "The Streak" will still be unbroken. After all, history has already proven that fact to be true.

JAMES HOLMAN
Tell City, IN

[Editor's Note: No excuse for this blunder, James. We flat-out blew it!]

UNDER THE RADAR

While your attention has been focused squarely on WWE and TNA, and possibly ROH as well, you've probably missed out on the compelling struggle for the Ohio Valley Wrestling heavyweight championship that has been going on for the past few months. While CM Punk and John Cena were stealing all of the mainstream attention, Cliff Compton, Matt Barella, and Mike Mondo were destroying themselves week after week in Lexington, Kentucky, for the fans of OVW.

It's the independent battles like these that are really hurt by the lack of a national television deal. But, if you get a chance, go find some of these matches by whatever means necessary. They have been some of the best OVW has produced in a long time, and this epic feud is sure to carry on for many months to come.

ALLEN DAVIS
Lexington, KY

RECOVERING JERICHOHOLIC

I want to thank you guys for the book excerpt from Chris Jericho's *Undisputed* (Volume 38, 2011). Reading about his early days in WWE was fascinating, especially the part about him dousing The Rock with tobacco juice! Great stuff! The excerpt inspired me to buy the book (which I suppose was the reason the publisher allowed you to run it).

Reading the book and the full transcript of the *PWI* "Press Conference" (March 2011) on your blog (prowrestlingillustrated.blogspot.com), I'm really ready for him to return. I know he will, but I hope it doesn't take years this time!

STAN JEFFERIES
Kingston, NY

DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!

I'm not sure I agree with the story in your last issue (Volume 38) warning the fans to not encourage Santino Marella's silly side. Why can't Santino be goofy and good at the same time? That's who he is and it's gotten him this far. He has to all of a sudden be solemn so he can concentrate better?

I don't think so.

PENNY BETROLLE
Newport News, VA □

sincerely yours

Send letters to:
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insideletters@yahoo.com

ROCK OF AGES

Finally! The Rock ... has come back! After years of waiting, The Rock at last made his triumphant return to *Raw*, and I can't tell you just how awesome it was. I've been watching *Raw* for many years, and lately it has been dragging. But the total shock I felt seeing "The Great One" strut down the aisle reminded me of the days during the old Monday Night War.

Here's to hoping that The Rock's appearance was more than just a one-night stand, and his "hosting" at WrestleMania will lead to a lasting memory for new and old wrestling fans alike.

JEDD DURDEN
Paoli, PA

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Jeff Hardy has earned the trust of TNA management, which was willing to give him the opportunity to regain the World title from Mr. Anderson. Reader Ronnie Beam will be happy when Hardy's personal problems are resolved.

PATIENCE ON TRIAL

Enough already. Month after month it's the same thing. "Jeff Hardy's trial is pushed back to [insert month here]." One way or another, can we please just get this over with?

TNA apparently has some insight as to how long it's going to be before a decision is made on Hardy's life, because they put the World belt back on him. As much as I like to watch him perform, personally, I think they're playing with fire with this guy.

RONNIE BEAM
Atlantic City, NJ

KUDOS ON ALMANAC

As a long-time fan of your magazines, I think one of the most overlooked things you guys do each year is the *Pro Wrestling Illustrated Almanac*. I can only imagine how much time and effort goes into this issue each year, but I want to speak for all fans of the mags when I say, job well done!

Besides highlighting all of the championship changes, and I know there are a ton, having all of your yearly lists at hand makes checking stats that much more simple!

Another big feature, at least for me, is how you guys can keep up to date with all of the wrestlers who come and go in this sport. Honestly, I can't tell you how awesome it is to have all of this kind of information right at my fingertips. Please, keep up that great work!

DAVID KENSINGTON
Clarkston, MI

LET BRYAN BE BRYAN

The more I follow Daniel Bryan's career, the more scared I am for what is becoming of him. I remember watching Bryan mop up the independent scene. It was refresh-

inside wrestling

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